

June 10, 2018

Be Transformed

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your reasonable act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."
Romans 12:1-2

"...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood...since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into his grace in which we now stand."
Romans 3:23-5:2

You and I are sinners. We personally and specifically continue to disobey God and because of our disobedience we are all doomed. We are objects of God's wrath. As we discussed last week that means that not one of us is going to escape hell. We have earned our condemnation and we will receive that condemnation.

If the story ended there we would live without hope. But the story does not end there. As Jesus tells us, ***"...God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*** (John 3:16) Motivated by his great love for us the God of creation let his one and only Son die on the cross as a ***"...sacrifice of atonement..."*** satisfying the requirement of the ***"Law of Sin and Death"*** for each and every one of us.

As Paul explains, God did this ***"...when we were still powerless..."***; ***"...while we were still sinners..."***; and ***"...when we were God's enemies..."*** Think about each of those statements for a moment.

"...when we were still powerless..." As we have often discussed, there is nothing we can do to erase a single sin from our existence. Once we commit a sin it becomes part of our permanent record. We cannot get it out by doing good works or by prayer or by church attendance. We are and continue to be powerless to remove our guilt.

"...while we were still sinners..." On my very best day I am still a sinner and I will always only be a sinner. As James writes, ***"...whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking it all."*** (James 2:10) When we fully understand that the ***"Law of Sin and Death"*** is absolute and that one sin is enough to condemn us then, and only then, will we realize how amazing God's grace really is.

"...when we were God's enemies..." Perhaps the most amazing aspect of God's grace is that he allowed Jesus to die on the cross for his enemies. When we live in disobedience to God's will we disappoint him, but far more than that, we become his enemies.



The Apostle's point here is, I think, very clear. God is one and only source of grace. God made grace happen and we had nothing to do with it. There was nothing and is nothing that you and I can do to make grace happen. Grace entered the world at the point on the cross when Jesus said, ***"It is finished."*** (John 19:30) the work of grace was finished. God's ***"...sacrifice for atonement..."*** is complete at the death of his Son.

So, the challenge for you and I is not to make grace happen. Nor is it to earn grace by our good deeds. The simple truth is, grace has already happened. God's grace is already here and it has been here since the moment of Christ's death. Our challenge is not to make grace happen, but to respond appropriately to God's existing grace.

How do we respond to a God who offers us his grace; who offers to fully justify us through the blood of his Son? We could, of course, reject God's grace. Many have done this and many still do it. Or, we can choose to respond to God's amazing grace with the only truly reasonable response. We can give God the life that he gave his Son's life to save.

In the final analysis our lives are really the only thing that we can give God. Our possessions are already his. Our time is already his. The only thing that we truly control and that we can therefore give to God in response to what he has given us, is our very existence. Thus, the Apostle will conclude, ***"What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"*** Dying to sin requires that I die to the thing that makes me a sinner; to my self. When my love of self dies, the source of sin in my life dies. Without death, burial is meaningless and resurrection is impossible.