

Romans 12:1-2
September 27, 2020
Rise Above It
Communion Sunday

Main Point: The challenges of 2020, the challenges of life in a fallen world, keep coming. How do we make it through? God gives us the motivation, power, and the path to thrive as we seek to love Him and love others as His people.

SI: Ah, 2020. What do we do? It was written in 1973, but cultural commentator Russell Moore jokingly suggested last week that it should be the temporary national anthem: Merle Haggard's "If We Make It Through December, We'll Be Alright."

Maybe the whole world feels that way about 2020.

And so we need strong medicine, a vaccine, an inoculation against the hits that keep coming.

Here in Romans 12, Paul is writing a transitional section of his letter. He has given this beautiful rendering of the human condition and of God's grace to rescue fallen man. Now, brothers and sisters, rise to who you are.

Read passage.

Intro: Rise above it. But how? I want to. I don't want to be a slave to my fears. I want to be fearless, confident, strong and courageous. How do we rise above it?

Hear the Motivation

Give in to the Power

Walk the Path

1 Hear the Appeal – By The Mercies of God (Motivation)

Hear His call...

Paul is transitioning here to imperatives – do this and don't do that – Hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good... humble yourselves... don't think of yourself too highly... do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly... and more.

As always in Scripture – the indicatives empower the imperatives – who you are and what you have received is the only way to godliness in action.

So first, and always, hear the appeal to go deep into God's mercies. This is what Paul does in Romans 1-11. So that we would look hard at the cross to be affected by what Jesus went through to atone for our disobedience. And Paul urges us to look at what God's mercy has led Him to do for us – Mercy is His heart – it is who He is –

ILLUS: Remember that teacher, coach, mentor who believed in you? Who you knew was for you? You would follow their instructions, their leadership because you knew they had your best in mind. They didn't just tell you to do it, they gave you the motivation to believe you could because they were with you to help you.

This is what Paul is saying – The mercies of God are with you, for you, behind you, under you. God has poured Himself out – the blood of Christ cries for mercy to be given to all who will throw their complete and total trust always and only on Jesus.

Since you have been given such a great salvation, since you have received this super-abundance of mercy from God, now – trans to 2... Give in to the power

2 Surrender to Who You Are (Power)

B/c You have been bought, captured by mercy, this gives you power to do what you would never do in your own natural pre-conversion state – surrender. “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice” Surrender comes from sacrifice – we are living sacrifices – living surrenderers. We surrender constantly because we have been captivated by the mercies of God. It’s kind of a stark picture – but Paul is pulling from the world of animal sacrifices. The animal gave up everything, obviously.

This is what the gospel enables – giving our whole selves, selling out completely to God in response to His mercy in saving us from ourselves. If left to ourselves, we would be Romans 1 – under His wrath due to our own unrighteousness and suppression of the truth and full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, gossip, slander, pride, and ruthlessness – like we’d all still be power hungry, ego driven, and self-absorbed.

We live this life of dying because our lives have been bought and now our lives are about loving others, not making everything about ourselves. (which is what the rest of ch 12 is about) This is how Paul can then call us to the contrast that the Scriptures constantly put before us. Be in the world, not of the world.

Surrendering to who you are as a receiver of undeserved mercy is the only way you can bear up against the shaping, conforming pressures of the world. By the mercies of God, you are a living sacrifice, living for God and His glory.

ILLUS > You may have noticed how we live in a distracted age. The amount of information available at our fingertips can easily overwhelm us and lead us away from contemplation, wonder, and awe. We don’t have time for that. The world shapes – conforms – to its own image of where fullness is found.

And what is the world’s answer? How do you find fullness, meaning, and value. Through yourself. Find your own meaning, purpose, value and worth.

In the book *Strange Rites, New Religions for a Godless Age*, Tara Burton, who is a columnist for Religion News Service, shows how the latest religious trend is to develop religious narratives based on what you personally like and leaving behind what you don’t. Many Christian leaders have lamented the rise of the category of the “none’s” – people who when filling out a census and asked to list their religion mark ‘none.’ Surveys indicate that in North America this might be as many as 50% of people, especially among those under 40. From Tim Challies review: “Burton believes that behind the Nones are people whose beliefs and practices are, to varying degrees, a mix of traditional institutional religions and personal, intuitional spiritualities. She

calls these people the “Remixed” and says that though they are drifting away from their Judeo-Christian roots, they are still seeking what religion offers: meaning (a sense of why the world is the way it is), purpose (shaping life according to that meaning), community (joining with others to better understand meaning and better enact purpose), and ritual (actions or occasions in which the community acts together to reify and reaffirm a sense of community and a sense of purpose).”

This jumped out at me because I encounter a lot of people like this. Interested in spiritual things – I’ve met very few atheists – but making it up as they go and going with their gut, their preferences, their intuition on what will make life work for them. Individualized but also instagrammed and enlivened by consumer branded products (like the wellness industry) so others can join on. As Burton details in her book, there is a hyper-focus on the here and now, on what is immanent – what is in front of me now and what I can do to achieve what I want to achieve. So you have YOLO driven experiences and the ever changing impermanence of social media and the abandonment of things like slow growth, contemplation, any thoughts of death and eternity.

But there is hope, there is always hope. The Church provides meaning, purpose, community, and ritual. And one way to renew your mind is to share the hope that being a Christian and being in the church gives you. Ultimately these new syncretistic religions offer hopelessness because there is nothing transcendent in them. There is no future hope in them.

Part then of not being conformed to this world and being transformed by the renewal of our minds is to go back to these slower practices and habits of contemplation, awe, wonder, looking deeply and longingly at the grandeur of God in His Word and Creation.

As someone prone to distraction, I have taken up the practice of getting out in nature and forcing myself to sit still and take it in. And it gives me ability to listen to God better, and to listen to others so that I can understand better where they are coming from and have something to give that is specific to their longing.

This is what I mean, then, by Surrender to Who You Are. You are unique, you are one of a kind, but you are not your own. You are living in the here and now, but you are also eternal. “If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.” (1 Cor 15:19)

The pressure to conform to this age is a strong temptation. The way we resist this is by constantly being renewed in our minds to who we really are and then living out of that reality.

Surrender so you can rise up.

Rise Above It so that you can wage war against who you are not.

Not in it to win it > it’s already been won

Not a competitor in a game for validation, likes, and thumbs up.

Where is your validation, your affirmation, your value and worth? Who defines that? Who gives you meaning and purpose? The world says dig down and find it in yourself. Create your own meaning and purpose, value and worth.

Paul says to Renew Your Mind so you can test and discern... trans to 3

We live in a distracted age. The news and social media are in snippets, snapshots, fast, fast, fast. As if all of America has gone ADHD – easily distracted, difficulty focusing. Beware of being conformed to that.

How am I supposed to react to this news story? Am I thinking like the world, or am I thinking like a child of God? Am I thinking like someone who is naked against the world, or like someone who is clothed in bullet proof armor by the transformative power of what God has done and who I am in Him?

Hear the appeal, surrender to who you are,

3 Enjoy Obedience (Path)

That you may approve/discern what is the will of God (see the rest of ch. 12)

The will of God is good and pleasing and perfect (complete)

That by testing you may discern...> (How to make it through December)

Slow words

Thinking takes time

Proposal: Listen, explore, ask > what do you believe and why do you believe it? When you are stressed, pressed, squeezed what comes out? When you give in to knee-jerk, you are prone to outbursts and adding pain, not bringing life. Be the Church through renewing your mind, examining what you really believe and what Christianity is and has to offer to the world.

Do I really believe God's way is best? Or do I trust myself above everything and anyone else?

Am I looking out for number 1 – myself – or can I die to myself because God has me?

When you know! When you know that God has you and that you don't deserve anything good, then you can follow Him, you will follow Him. It's supernatural.

See 1 Peter 1:14 – 'as obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance' – illus from parenting – parents show your kids that this is the way, walk in it and it will go well with you – obeying your parents brings joy and peace. Disobedience brings wrath and discipline

The way of flourishing. The path to life.

So that this is what Christians are FOR – this is our theme of late, what God has led your pastors to preach and teach on – Brad preaching through Nehemiah, Blake on 1 Peter 4 and not being surprised by these fiery trials, today do not be conformed but be transformed.

We, the Church, and we AVPC are here to be a witness, a bulwark, a strong fortress of refuge, rest, peace, and renewal. Flourishing. Giving life. Giving out joy.

*ILLUS of people wondering why all these smores and cookies were free at the Food Truck Night. Because this is what we do. We sacrifice ourselves in order to better others.

Because we have all we could ever possibly need or want in the person and work of Christ. So renew your minds. Re-member your minds. Reattach the truth to your minds through repentance and faith. Through rising above the conformity that presses so hard against God's people.

Conc: Have institutions failed? Has the church been unfaithful? Augustine – “She’s a prostitute, but she’s my mother.” But where else would you go? What other life can we hold out to people? That which is immanent is only that – not permanent, and therefore, ultimately shot through with hopelessness. But we preach a Savior crucified for us and raised to life for us to have life now and forever.

The gates of hell will besiege, bombard, and attack with all their fiendish, hellish fire. But the Church will stand b/c God's people are not conformed to the pattern of this age, but are renewed in their minds constantly with the transcendent realities of what God has done and will do for all who throw all their lot in with Him.

Communion: The ritual, ceremony, the sacrament that breaks the line between earth and heaven. Jesus instituted earthly means to give us heavenly realities. He uses what is immanent – seen, felt, touched, tasted in the moment, in the here and now – to give us the transcendent heavenly realities.