

Untitled (61)

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Preacher: Caleb Evans

[0:00] Amen.

So, the Apostle Paul's instruction not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think is a particularly tough one to follow in the year 2020.

I can't hold but think that it must have been easier to do that before the internet was invented.

Seriously, though, social media seems like a perfect opportunity to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think.

How do I know that? Well, because I have taken that bait before and I'm guessing you probably have too. We've all been there. Social media attempts us to say, Look how awesome my life is. Look at these perfect pictures. Look and bow down in adoration. Aren't these perfect pictures of my perfect life just awesome? By the way, look at my posts and look at how right I am.

[1:25] Not only am I right, but you, good sir, are an idiot. My snarky meme that I, along with 50,000 other people just shared, demonstrates how much smarter I am than you.

We've all been there, haven't we? It is a recipe for thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. It's also a great recipe for being conformed to the ways of the world.

It's a great way to think about worldly things all the time in exactly the same way that the world does. We can flood our minds with nothing but worldly thinking if we're not careful because it is only a click or a post away.

It's easy to think that our age is unique, though. In reality, our circumstances might change.

But human nature does not change. The same sinful tendencies that might cause me to think that it is a good idea to be a jerk on social media to my first cousin thrice removed, those same tendencies were also present in the New Testament church.

[2:40] that Paul was writing to in Romans. We've been in Romans for our epistle readings for a good while now.

Up to this point, Paul has been laying out the theology of the gospel really carefully. And we've now reached the point where Paul begins to look at how we apply in our lives and in the church what we have learned so far.

How best do we respond to the gospel by which we have been saved by grace alone in Christ alone?

Being justified by the blood of Christ, as Paul reminded us earlier in his epistle that we are, how do we live, and what then should our life together as a church look like?

These are the questions, I think, at the heart of this morning's passage from Romans 12. So that is what I would like us to think about together this morning.

[3:42] If you have your Bibles handy, please look at Romans 12, beginning at verse 1, as we see what God's Word has to teach us today.

So beginning in verse 1, we read this, I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

So how do we respond to the gospel? How do we respond to being freely forgiven through the cross? Paul is beginning to lay out this very thing.

Fundamentally, we're already seeing here, we are called to live lives of gratitude to the God who sent his only Son to free us from sin and from death.

What does that mean? Well, what that means is that we are not living for ourselves anymore. We are living for the one who loved us and died for us.

[4:55] We present ourselves to him knowing that our lives are no longer our own. Our lives are no longer our own because we have been bought with the price of the precious blood of the Son of

God.

And then we worship him in spirit and in truth because that is the only fitting response to our redemption in Christ Jesus. That means that we don't just have a compartmentalized portion of our lives that is for religion.

The tidy, nice religion category. That means that we don't just go to church on Sundays. That means that we live with an awareness that every single aspect of our lives belongs to Jesus Christ and to him alone.

Everything. Our bodies, they belong to Jesus. Our time, it belongs to Jesus. Our family life, it belongs to Jesus. Our career, it belongs to Jesus.

Our minds, they belong to Jesus. Our souls, they belong to Jesus. All of our possessions, they belong to Jesus. Our homes, they belong to Jesus.

[6:11] I could go on and on and on, but you get the point. Everything that we are inclined to say is ours. It all belongs to Jesus. Everything is in service to him.

That's what it means to live as a living sacrifice. To live with that reality that our whole reason for existing is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

To worship him. That is what the kind of spiritual worship that Paul is talking about here comes down to, really. Paul goes on to talk a bit more about what that looks like in practice.

Let's look at verse 2. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Do not be conformed to this world. That is a hard thing for the church in America in the year 2020 to hear and take to heart.

[7:28] We live in what is probably the most privileged society in the history of the world, which means that it's got to be one of the most materialistic societies in the history of the world.

Do you think that we might be tempted to be a little bit distracted? We have been. Here is the fruit we've seen from it.

It's this. The church in America today, from what I can observe, seems to have fallen into the trap of thinking that we are going to win over the world by being conformed to the world.

So what we'll do is we'll echo the culture around us to appeal to people. We'll be like the world and just have a little bit of a religious Jesus twist thrown in there.

And so the church in America has said, you know this stuff about Jesus being the way, the truth, and the life, and no one coming to the Father but by Him? Yeah, that's not appealing to people.

[8:34] We can't have that. How are we ever going to win anyone over with that? So here's what we'll do. We'll devote our attention to morals, to teaching folks to be good people.

Or maybe we can make political activism our primary purpose, so that we're actually useful for something. Or you know what? We can turn our churches into entertainment venues and make our sermons into tips about how to live your best life now.

What's the result? It's been a disaster. Recently, I saw a new study, and study after study has shown, for example, that many people who profess Christ in our nation are really technically and formally heretics.

A recent study indicated that a large chunk of people who profess Christ in our country are Pelagians.

What does that mean? That's one of those fancy theological words. In essence, here's what it means. Many who profess Christ today think that being a Christian means doing your best to be a good person because good people go to heaven.

[9:53] Lord have mercy. What a train wreck the church has become. What about the fact that we are all wretched sinners who desperately need Jesus?

That's not popular to talk about. What about the fact that salvation is a free gift of God's grace in Jesus Christ? Well, that doesn't seem to draw in the crowds. What about the fact that our only hope is Christ and Him crucified?

In many pulpits, in many churches this morning, there will not be a hint of this message. Why? Because we have become conformed to this world.

And not only that, we have forgotten how to be transformed by the renewal of our minds. Do you know how we're transformed by the renewal of our minds?

I will give you a hint. It is God's Word. If we neglect the Scriptures, if we neglect the Word of God, we will therefore know absolutely nothing about the renewal of our minds that Paul is talking about here.

[11:14] If the Scriptures have no place in our churches, if the Scriptures have no place in our homes, you can rest assured that we will be positively conformed to the world.

That's how that works. And brothers and sisters, we are called to be conformed to the Gospel. Called to be conformed to Christ, not to the world. We do no service to the Gospel by thinking that conforming to the world will win people to the Gospel.

Gospel motivates us to offer ourselves to the service of Christ and the biblical Gospel, and nothing else renews our minds.

Now, the Gospel not only has implications for our personal lives, for our witness to the world, it has implications for our life together and how we build one another up.

Paul continues in verse 3. For by the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

[12:40] We shouldn't think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. Man, that is hard, isn't it? The sin in our hearts prompts us to always want to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think.

And that is why the Gospel is so important. Who am I to think that I am better or more important than other people, than my brothers and sisters? And who are you to think that you're better than others either?

I'm a sinner saved by grace. What about you? I don't sing it like this. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved an all-around decent guy who's pretty special, like me.

By nature, I am a sinner and a rebel against God who deserves nothing but God's wrath and judgment. It's the boat we're all in by nature.

Yet God has called us to faith in his Son and has adopted us into his family. Not because we are awesome, but because he is awesome. Only when we see ourselves in this light can we begin to understand who we are, what our place in the church is, and how we should relate to our brothers and our sisters in Christ.

[14:03] We all have different gifts. More on that in a minute. But these gifts are not about us. We all have different responsibilities, but that does not make anyone unimportant.

Fundamentally, looking in light of the gospel, we are all forgiven sinners who are in this thing together and who need each other. As Paul continues, for as in one body, we have many members and the members do not all have the same function.

So we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually members one of another. So again, we each have our responsibilities, we each have our function, as Paul puts it.

But at the end of the day, all of us need each other. He fleshes that out. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.

If prophecy in proportion to our faith, if service in our servant, the one who teaches in his teaching, the one who exhorts in his exhortation, the one who contributes in generosity, the one who leads with zeal, the one who does acts of mercy with cheerfulness.

[15:39] We all have different gifts. But whatever those spiritual gifts are, those gifts are for us to use to help each other to know Jesus better.

And, here's the thing, the gifts that we have, the functions that we have, instead of being used for us to help each other know Jesus better, if we're not careful, if we don't keep a gospel focus, we can turn those things that are good into opportunities to inflate our egos.

So it's easy for the rector to say, hey, you know what, I'm charged with proclaiming the word of God, standing at the table, and serving as the spiritual leader of the congregation. That's pretty special, and I am kind of a big deal.

It's easy for someone else to say, I contribute generously. I suspect I am one of the biggest givers in the church. I'm kind of a big deal. It's easy for someone else to say, I've been leading Bible studies for a whole lot of years.

I'm kind of a big deal. It's easy for someone else to say, I put on the copy on Sunday mornings, and the rector, who is a tired dad, would be a zombie without me. I'm kind of a big deal.

[16:55] And to be fair, you are kind of a big deal. You minister to me more than words could ever express. But it's easy for someone else to say, you should see how many homeless people I have ministered to.

I'm kind of a big deal. And that attitude misses the point in light of the gospel, however it expresses itself, doesn't it? The church is a bunch of forgiven sinners who belong to Jesus, are called to bear witness to Jesus, and called to help other forgiven sinners come to know Jesus better.

That's what it boils down to. There's no room at all for egos. None of us deserve to have big heads. I don't have any room to have a big head, although I am aware that physically speaking, I wear extra large hats.

But the point is, I need you and we need each other. So we come to a close. I just want to say this. Paul's words to us this morning are challenging. Maybe you've heard this and you've said, wait a minute. I have failed to offer my body as a living sacrifice to God.

[18:20] Wait a minute. I have been too conformed to the ways of this world. Maybe you're saying, oh man, I have thought more highly of myself than I ought to think.

Maybe you're saying, in light of this, I've failed to serve my brothers and my sisters in Christ the way that I should. What do we say when we're convicted by God's word?

How do we respond? I think we know that it's by grace that we came to Jesus. Thank God for the cross that the shed blood of Jesus covered all of those heinous sins that we committed before we became believers.

But don't forget, Jesus was nailed to the cross for your failure or mine to offer ourselves as living sacrifices.

Jesus was nailed to the cross for our being to conform to the ways of this world. Jesus was nailed to the cross for our thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think.

[19:30] And Jesus was nailed to the cross for any of our failures to serve our brothers and sisters in Christ and love them the way that we should. Here's the thing.

Jesus went to the cross too. for the sins that you and I would commit even after we came to faith in him. We can think of the call to repent and believe the gospel as being only for unbelievers.

We can fall into thinking that we have moved past that, but we have not. That call to repent and believe the gospel is for you and for me this morning.

So let's repent, believe the gospel today, and offer ourselves as living sacrifices to our Lord Jesus. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.