God’s Mercy Makes Us Different

Romans 12:1-8

The shelves in the grocery store were pretty bare on Wednesday. I have not been back to the grocery store since. I would assume from the pictures my sister in law in Iowa has posted for the store she works at, the situation has not changed very much in the past few days.

It seems that self-preservation is the highest priority on most people’s agenda. Granted this is a natural response to a situation we have never seen in our lifetime, but it also reveals the true nature of the people of our society. We tend to be self focused.

Thankfully there are a lot of people who are others concerned. Those who work in the health care industry, supermarket employees, gas station attendants, and many others are working hard at their own risk for the sake of others.

Many are making a special effort to wash their hands more not just for their own health but so they don’t give the virus to other people. Grocery stores and other essential places changing their shifts and giving time in the early morning for the senior citizens to get their provisions, demonstrate the good things going on in our society.

For Christians this pandemic, as it is being called, gives us unique opportunity. The Christian life, especially in times of crisis should have a marked difference than the life of the non believer. What is the reason for this difference? It is founded on three truths.

I. The Mercy of God

II. A Proper Response to the Mercy of God

III. A Communal Responsibility Because of the Mercy of God

I. The Mercy of God – Romans 12:1

Paul writes to the Roman believers and calls them to a radically different lifestyle. That comes later under our second truth, let’s just say for now that the believer in Jesus Christ is to be completely opposite of what he or she was before. Why should we be different, why should we give ourselves over to the will of God? The reason for this difference is the mercy of God.

Romans 12 marks a shift in the book of Romans. The first eleven chapters are a thesis on the great truth that man who is not right with God, enemies of God, alienated from God, can be have peace with God, be reconciled to God and have the righteousness of God the Son imputed to them.

This new standing comes only by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, Romans 10:9-10. We who were without strength, strength to resolve our separation from God through good works, have one who loved us and died for us (Romans 5:8), Jesus Christ. By faith in His death and resurrection, we can be saved from sin and death and hell.

We deserve none of this kindness, but God has extended it to the one who believes through His mercy and grace. It is because of the mercy of God that we are not consumed (either by a pandemic or ultimately by our sin). So then by the mercy of God, He has reached down to us in our misery, our shame, our death and through His Son Jesus given us by faith hope, forgiveness and life.

That great work of salvation is in and of itself what makes a radical difference in us. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe, Romans 1:16.

What a wonderful thing to have the confidence that even in uncertain times, you know that you have eternal life (I John 5:13), that you are kept in the Father’s hands (John 10:27-30). Do you have this confidence? Have you tasted of God’s mercy in Jesus Christ?

Because of the gospel our lives should be different and how we look at the situations of life is completely different.

II. The Proper Response to the Mercy of God. Romans 12:1-2

 Paul’s call to a different way of living is found in Romans 12:1-2.

A. Because of the mercy of God, we should present our bodies as a living sacrifice to the Lord, seeking to do His will. This is the first difference that the believer has in the way he lives.

The will of God becomes primary over our own purposes. I am saved from my sin to live for my Savior’s purposes. Rather than self preservation I live for Christ’s praise. I am to give myself to the will and purpose of God for it is only logical that I should do so since He gave His Son for me. That means that I put the kingdom of God and His righteousness first in my life. Matthew 6:33.

B. Because of God’s mercy, I should pursue transformation by the renewing of my mind. Romans 12:2

God in His mercy saves us from our sin through faith in Christ. Then by His mercy and through the ministry of the Word, He renews our mind so that we are transformed from what we were into what He would have us to be.

I need to be transformed by the Word of God so that I am not like the world. If I don’t spend time in the Bible I will gravitate toward thinking like the world thinks. I will be self focused instead of Christ focused and other’s oriented. I will struggle more with sin, I will pursue my will first, but I need the Word of God to change me so I will live God’s way and mature to be like God’s Son, Jesus.

A friend who was diagnosed with cancer years ago told of how this verse changed his life. He would wake up every morning and the first question he asked was “Lord, what would YOU have me do today?” God’s will first!

As we respond to God’s mercy in Christ our perspective on life itself should be constantly changing to mirror the will of God and the life of Jesus.

May the mind of Christ my Savior
Live in me from day to day,
By His love and pow’r controlling
  All I do and say.

III. Communal Responsibility because of the Mercy of God. Romans 12:3-8

The remainder of the passage speaks of our relationship with one another in the body of Christ. We are touched by the mercy of God in salvation so that we might not live for ourselves alone but in community and that community is the church.

I realize in the times we are living in, social distancing is the thing. Not just for the virus situation we are under, but our schedules, our society are about relationships at a distance. I hope that when this period of time is over and the all clear is sounded that we can really move back to more personal interaction with people.

The body of Christ was built for interaction. Paul says that in humility (Romans 12:3) we need to understand the great role God’s grace and mercy has played in our lives making us who are nothing into something special in Christ.

From that special position in Christ we have been brought into fellowship with one another (Romans 12:4). And in that fellowship we have the unique opportunity to use the gifts that God has, in His mercy and grace given, so we can serve each other.

That service will look different as we use our grace gifts, but it will all be service that is other’s focused. So in this time of distance, those who proclaim the Word, keep proclaiming. Those who serve, keep serving, givers give on, those who teach keep teaching, exhorters go on exhorting, leader lead away, mercy shower keep being compassionate (no hugs!).

To serve with our gifts in times of isolation will involve some Spirit led creativity, so seek God’s wisdom in doing what you can to serve and minister to the body with your gifts.

Here are a few suggestions:

-Use social media to get the truth out in a loving and winsome way. Facebook Messenger is a good way to check on people and trying to reach out with truth.

-Write letters. The mail man just came through, corona isn’t stopping them so use it to encourage and serve.

-Look for charities that help people in need. With much of working America not working, look for ways to give.

-Be meals on wheels for people. Pick up groceries for those who can’t get out or are afraid of getting out. Offer to help wherever you can, even if it is from a distance.

-Pray. Call your neighbors and ask for prayer requests. Just talking with someone on the phone will be a balm for them.

Christ makes a difference in your life. You can see it in the time of crisis. Do you have confidence that whatever happens, you have the eternal hope found in Jesus?

Are you seeing life more and more from God’s perspective and are pursuing His will?

Are you looking to serve others with the gifts you have been given?

The MERCY of God is the foundation for this difference. May we make a difference by the Mercy of God.