

1 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 spiritual act of worship. **2** 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. **3** For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. **4** Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, **5** so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. **6** We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. **7** If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; **8** if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

Let's play a little game. Describe what you see upfront in each of these pictures. I'll flip through the three, then you can answer: [Look at examples briefly, then return to reading.]

What did you see upfront?

Now before you go back and look at the pictures again, can you tell me what else was in each of the pictures? [pause for answers] Let's go back through and identify what got relegated to the background – in one case really even “buried” under foot – in these selfies. [Go back through examples: Eiffel Tower; Christ the Redeemer statue Rio de Janeiro; Niagara Falls .]

Do you see what happened? These are magnificent sights being overshadowed or blocked by people. [concept taken from: True Worship in a Selfie World, by Stephen Miller]

You may already see that I'm headed for a topic bigger than just snapshots. How often is a person's view of things filled up with self?

Let's not just talk “people.” Let's talk “us.” There is a deeper issue to explore than just our picture-taking-choices. How does this relate to what we are doing here – actually, what we do all the time? I'm talking about worship.

A Christian author shared an exchange that occurred following a worship gathering. Someone said: “I didn't like that service.” “So what?”, came the reply, “We're not worshipping you.” [Preach the Word, citing Christian author Marva Dawn]



There's a natural desire in us to approach worship – well, everything in life, really –through a “selfie-ish” kind of lens.

We each show selfie-esque behavior & attitudes. At such times, what's either misdirected or out of focus? Our view. Do we get so occupied with the tasks of life that we get tunnel vision, overlooking others, or even relegating God to the background? Do we get lured away from following God's good, perfect & pleasing will by a devilish temptation that catches our eye?

We understand – more than that, you and I *confess* – the self-regarding ways of each one of us (as we sung in the hymn “The Love of Christ Who Died For Me”).

And this is why we stand in such awe at the view of our God's mercy!

God's mercy is breathtaking! We stand on Holy Spirit-given ground, as we breathe out: “Praise be to the God & Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Mercy (NIV: Compassion) and the God of all comfort!” (2 Cor. 1:3).

His mercy - still true each day, new to meet my need for this day. →

That's the basis for this section, which begins: “Therefore, in view of God's mercy...” “Therefore” tells you to: Flip back. Flip back and see the view spoken throughout Romans leading up to our verses...

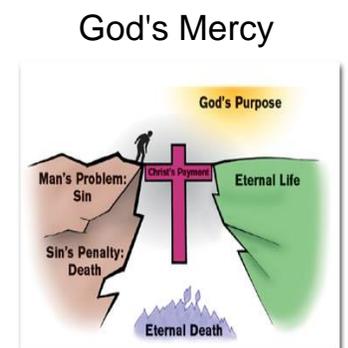
A view of God's Mercy



- 11:30-32,33-36 We are recipients of God's gift of Mercy. Oh the depth of the wisdom of God! His thoughts and ways are higher than ours. We never would have come up with the idea of such mercy! Left to our own way, we would have traveled the way that seems right to human reason but leads straight to hell. But there is now. . .
- 8:1 No condemnation for us who are in Christ Jesus. Why? Because . . .
- 5:1-2 Through faith in Jesus Christ we have gained access into this grace in which we now stand. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.
- 4:1-16 A right standing with God is not earned by us. It never could be! It has been gifted to us from God. Payment is not demanded from us for forgiveness. It comes by God's undeserved love (grace).
- 3:20-26 For we all fall short of the glory of God. But we are justified freely by God's grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. The righteousness of God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

Praise be to God! You know this – you hold this view.

Now, think of those who only know the selfie-ish view - who don't know God – who don't know Jesus' love. There was an interesting article on *Bread for Beggars*. It's entitled: “50



Shades of what are you looking for?" It comments on the "50 Shades of Grey" craze, and gives a biblical answer to those who throw out the "What's wrong with it?" challenge. I think it is well written. I especially like how the author goes a step further, to identify: people of the world are searching for the "something" lacking in life. How desperately people are in search for this something. Intimacy – a deep connection – acceptance – to be valued – support - stability – to be loved unconditionally. Everything, by the way, that the "50 Shades of Grey" pattern is not.

Maybe people seek to find the something lacking through relationships. Maybe through career advancement, maybe through prestige/reputation. Living good enough. Being liked well enough.

This is why the words of Romans 12:1-2 are so important. Your view is different from the world's. Do you see how transformational it is to have a view of God's Mercy?

From: desperately seeking something – "I need *help!*" To: "I have everything I need in Christ. He is my help." From: "I want attention / someone to love me." To: "I have received the attention of the Maker of the Universe, and am loved by him. He proved it!"

Having this as your view makes everything different in life. Your life, Christian, is one of thanksgiving. And trust. You see how trust in the Lord frees us **for** giving ourselves as living sacrifices to him.

Read vs.1-2 again.

"All in..." All our things, all our time, all our abilities used to live for our God to glorify Him. The description "offer yourselves as living sacrifices" paints a 360 degree panorama of our lives. We offer ourselves to God as we fill our roles as nurturing parents, as children who show respect, as employees who put their God-given talents to work. My offering to God comes in every part of my life; it's not just limited to one slice of life.

The world asks: "Where do you get this willingness to go along with - even seemingly rejoice over - what God says?" They look at *teachings* that *seem so challenging, which* go counter to our culture. And they say: "I mean, c'mon, we're living in the 21st century! Sounds to me like you've been brainwashed, or something. Are you just mindless sheep?"

The world asks: "Don't you think you have to assert yourself at some point, look out for your own interest, make sure you're secure in your position, make yourself stand out?"

You're not surprised when the world doesn't "get" why we live the way we do, are you?

It all comes back to this: A grasp on God's love and mercy to us is transformational. It is the source for attitudes that go against the current of culture and of popular ideology. God's love and mercy to us gives us the strength to break free from the world's pattern of behavior.

- Take the example of the different roles of service God describes in vs.6-8 [look back to these verses]. We can serve selflessly. We can serve in different roles [click to highlight], and trust that *different* doesn't mean less important.
- Go a little further. Love is the first word of vs.9. Right after the list of different ways to serve one another, we're encouraged "love sincerely" & "...in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves." So different from the pattern of the world, right? We're able – by God's grace – to have the attitude: "I'll use my gifts to serve others. I can do that because I trust that while I serve others, the Lord will take care of me. The Lord knows how to provide others to serve me. He'll make sure my every need is met. He has promised just that."

Ah, we're right back to the difference a view of God's mercy makes.

A lot of ink has been spent lately on the topic of worldview. If you haven't heard that terminology thrown around, it's simply talking about how one looks at life & the world. Picture it like putting on a set of lenses. A worldview is the lenses through which one sees every aspect of life. It, therefore, affects your perspective on everything.

God has given us a worldview that is nothing short of transformational. It's a view so opposite of what is the norm or what is trending in culture.

The description given of God's people in Romans 12:1-2 is: transformed. The Church has a transformational view...

May the Lord grant that we keep returning to the view outside Easter's tomb, looking in at its emptiness... looking behind it a little ways to see the blood-stained cross, it too, now empty... He took away our sins, nailing it to the cross (Colossians). And then looking to the present reality, which no camera can capture, but that should fill our view/our lens that we use to see life: Jesus standing right by our side – alive & accompanying us every step of life's way! Amen.