

# *Shaped By His Grace*

Congregational Theme 2013

## I. Introduction

- A. A lump of clay is put on the potter's wheel and it begins to spin. Left to itself it is nothing more than a spinning lump, uneven, unformed, unusable. It doesn't begin to take on shape until it is touched by the potter's hands. The skill of the potter will determine the value of the vessel created. Unskilled or uncaring hands will create a marred pot which is easily broken. But the hands of an expert can take that same lump of clay and create a vessel fit for a king.
1. Our lives are a lot like that lump of clay. Spinning through our day we are shaped by the things we allow to touch our lives. Everything we do, read, hear, and watch forms what we become.
  2. Our congregational theme for this year asks the fundamental question, "What is shaping our lives?" Our lumps of clay are all made up differently. We have all received our share of dints and scars through the years. But, what will we allow to shape our lives now?
- B. Most people allow their lives to be shaped by ambition and reward, acceptance and pleasure, fear and responsibility. These things are what fuel most people's lives. They form who they are.
1. But, this year I want us to see that disciples of Jesus are formed by something very different. What shapes our schedules and forms our values, and fuels our dreams, is very different from the people in this world. We are shaped by God's grace! It is what God has done for us and is doing for us that forms who we are.
  2. This year I want us to be more grateful and empowered by God's grace so we can say with the apostle Paul, "*By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect.*" (1 Corinthians 15:10). God's grace is to make us who we are, and effect what we become. God's grace saves us, true enough. But, it is also to shape us. God's grace is to be the reason why we do what we do. Paul goes on to say, "*I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me*" (1 Cor. 15:10). God's grace is to work in us, and through us, until we are shaped by His grace.
  3. This year we are going to learn a lot about God's grace, and how it shapes our lives. Simply put, God's grace is to have most profound influence, impact, impression in our lives. God's grace is to shape who we are.
- C. Paul makes this point in the book of Ephesians. He spends three chapters talking about how we are saved by God's grace. In chapter 1 he says, "*In [Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.*" (Eph. 1:7). He goes on in chapter two to write, "*By grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God*" (Eph. 2:8). He talks about how God has forgiven us, made us one, and accepted us as His people.
1. In light of such grace Paul says this in chapter 4:1, "*Therefore I urge you to live worthy of the calling with which you were called.*" The wonderful nature of God's grace towards us, deserves a certain response in how we live our lives.

2. When someone says, “I’m religious, but I don’t let it run my life.” they show they don’t understand the grace of God. When you constantly have to plead with someone to put away sin and seek the kingdom of God, it shows they don’t understand the grace of God. When someone is bored by worship and unmotivated to share the gospel, it shows they don’t understand the grace of God. When people have little joy in Christ and have to be begged to serve God’s people, it shows they don’t understand the grace of God.
  3. Because Paul is saying, “When you understand how great the grace of God is, you live worthy of it!”
- D. No text makes that point more clearly than Romans 12, which will be our text for this lesson. In this pivotal and most memorable texts Paul tells us we are to be shaped by His grace. You hear it in the opening line. Romans 12:1 says, *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy.”* Paul says, “I want you to look at God’s mercy—His grace, and in view of that I want you to live a certain way. In other words, “I want you to be shaped by His grace.” And Paul goes on to pen one of the most practical and transforming words in Scripture.
1. But, and don’t miss this, they are only they are only effective and powerful in the life of someone who sees the grace of God. Grace is the motive for the action, or the action is soon abandoned. If you try to follow the commands found in Romans 12 because you want to, or you are supposed to, you will quickly abandon them because they are not easy or always pleasant. However, if you see how gracious God has been to you, you will gladly and powerfully do what He calls you to do.
  2. So, before we consider our work, we need to see His grace. That is why that word *“Therefore”* is in verse 1. A panoramic view of God’s grace is masterfully painted in the first 11 chapters of Romans. If we are going to be properly shaped in Christ, we must first see His grace toward us. I want you to see yourself in Romans 1 – 11.

## II. See His Grace Toward You

- A. ***I Am A Sinner.*** Romans contains this fundamental truth, “I am a sinner.” *“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (Rom. 3:23). I have missed what God created me to be. I have sinned in a multitude of ways that has eternally marred the soul God created for me. Now, I can walk around and compare my cracked pot to all the other crack pots around me and think, “I’m alright.” But God didn’t create us to be a cracked pot. He created us to be fit for His glory—His presence. We simply are not! You can take the most vile pagan, which Paul does in Romans 1, or you can take the most fervent believer, as Paul does in Romans 2, and the conclusion is the same, *“There is no one righteous, no, not one”* (Romans 3:10). The wonder of God’s grace begins by seeing the wonder of who we are!
1. We can ignore our sin, but we cannot deny it. What if I had a video recording of all of the sinful, selfish, hurtful things you’ve ever done in your life, and I bought you up here and sat you in a chair and I played it for everyone to see. Ah, we don’t feel so self-righteous anymore, do we? We would rightly be embarrassed for people to see that.

2. Imagine that video being played before our parents, the people at work. Now, we are beginning to see our sin better.
3. Now, imagine that video being played in the presence of our righteous Judge and God in the Day of Judgment with eternity weighing in the balance. Sin! We all have it, and it is our biggest problem. Why is it a problem?

**B. *God's Wrath Comes Against Sin.*** Because, God's wrath comes against sin. Sin in our lives is not a neutral thing. Sin always brings punishment and pain. God did not make us to live with sin, and He cannot live with sin. So, Romans 1:18 says, *"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth by their unrighteousness."* God's wrath is poured out against sin. And He doesn't miss. And He's not selective. And He doesn't always wait. All sin calls forth God's wrath now and in eternity.

1. Sin is not neutral. If I have the flu virus lodged in my throat it is not satisfied to remain inert. No, it calls upon the resources of my body and makes me sick.
2. The God who created us did not make us to sin, and when we let sin into our lives, that sin calls forth all the resources of our minds, bodies and this world to afflict us and condemn us eternally. Paul said to even the most religious among us in Romans 2:5, *"you are storing up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, <sup>6</sup> who "will render to each one according to his deeds" "* (Rom 2:5-6). That is where we are at! We are sinners, every one of us, we are experiencing the righteous wrath of God against our sin. And try as we might we cannot shed the eternal consequence of one single sin. We are the definition of hopeless.

**C. *God's Love Sent Jesus To Die For Our Sins.*** But then the most amazing, undeserved thing happened,

*"God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup> Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. <sup>10</sup> For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."* (Romans 5:8-10)

Sinners, wrath bound, enemies of God; saved, justified, reconciled because Christ died for us! That's grace. Stunning, abundant grace! As Glenda Schales wrote, *"Through Your beloved Son, there is grace so undeserved"* (Healing In Its Wings). Jesus didn't have to come to this sin soaked earth. He didn't have to be rejected by His creation. He didn't have to accept the righteous wrath of God in our place—we didn't deserve it; we earned our sentence of death—but we are *"justified freely by His grace"* (3:24). As Charles Wesley wrote,

You left Your Father's throne above,  
So free, and infinite your Grace;  
Emptied Yourself of all but love,  
And bled for Adam's helpless race.  
Amazing love, how can it be,  
That You, my God, would die for me.

*(And Can It Be, Charles Wesley)*

To see God's grace is to be stunned at how personal it is, how underserved it is, at how inclusive it is, and how thorough it is. It is for the worst that is in all of us. There is not a person or a sin that the grace of God cannot reach. Paul writes in Romans 5:20, "*Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more*" (see also Rom. 3:24-26).

- D. ***I Am Saved!*** We rightly deserved separation, wrath and death for our sins. That was the righteous penalty. Yet, died for me, for all my sins, so I can be saved from consequences of my actions. Grace! You can hear the shocked awareness of this grace in Paul's words in Romans 7:24. Paul gets it. He gets it personally when he says,

O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? <sup>25</sup> I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:24-25)

Why? He goes on in the next verse to say,

"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1)

By grace we are adopted into the family of God and can call upon Him as "*Abba, Father*" (8:15). By grace, we are no longer recipients of the wrath of God, but undeserved heirs of the help of God. So that we can now say with God,

"If God *is* for us, who *can* be against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? ... in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us....[nothing] shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:31-32, 37, 39)

Nothing is more urgently needed, nor more abundantly received than the grace of God! Saved, yes! But, saved to such abundant blessings—that's grace!

- E. Once we understand the hopelessness of our sins, the fearful and just wrath of God, the amazing forgiveness achieved by Christ on the cross, and the sheer wonder of all we have in Christ—we are beginning to understand grace.
1. And if we are in our right mind we will ask, "How do I respond to a grace like that?" Then we are ready for Romans 12. Then we are ready to be shaped by His grace.
  2. And when we turn to Romans 12 we find four ways His grace is to shape us. These four areas will form the focus of our attention this year, as we strive to be shaped by His grace.

### III. Those Shaped By His Grace

- A. ***Sacrifice For God (Rom. 12:1)***. When you see God's mercies, the first thing you do in verse 1 is, "*offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service*" (Rom. 12:1). It's just reasonable. It makes sense. In sight of how He sacrificially gave Himself for us, we should give our bodies as living sacrifices to Him.

1. The reason there is so little sacrifice among the God's people today is because there is so little appreciation of His grace. But those who have been saved by the cross of Christ have a new found respect for sacrifice.

2. We willingly, joyfully do hard things in God’s service, because of God’s grace. We lay our pleasures, our possessions, our pride, our position, our reputation, our rights on the altar and say, “Take them Father for You deserve all of it and more.” As Isaac Watts so memorably wrote,

All the vain things that charm me most,  
I sacrifice them to His blood.  
Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were a present far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.”

*(Isaac Watts; When I Survey The Wondrous Cross).*

We are only shaped by His grace to the extent that we sacrifice our wants in preference to God’s ways. Are you saved by grace? It should show in your sacrifice.

3. Sometimes when I try to encourage people to put Christ first in their lives I talk about how the church needs them, or their families need them, or the lost need them. I speak of responsibility and obedience. All of those things are true. But brothers and sisters, just one glimpse of His grace would make us shrink into embarrassment over asserting our rights and our wants. People who are shaped by grace don’t reluctantly give the average; they sacrificially give themselves to God’s purposes.

**B. *Separate From The World (Rom. 12:2).*** Being shaped by His grace also means being separate from the world. *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind”* (Rom. 12:2). The Biblical picture of this world is dramatically different from the thinking of most people. Most people think this world is basically a good place to plug into and go along with. But the Bible says, *“the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.”* (1 John 5:19). The way this world does marriage, business, child raising, and entertainment is corrupted by sin and Satan, which will mold your life into something that is useless to the Lord.

1. Paul says, “Don’t even play with it!” *“Do not be conformed to this world.”* We tend to think the distractions and values of this world are rather innocuous. “They are no big deal.” But brothers and sisters, if we could just see the petty things we do in light of the cross we would see how foolish and wasteful they are. If we could just see the sin and selfishness that dominates the entertainment and values of this culture in light of the blood of Jesus we would see how hideous and awful they really are. Jesus died on the cross to eradicate sin from the world, and those who are shaped by His grace do not participate in it (Titus 2:11-12).
2. Rather, we fill our minds with the *“good and acceptable and perfect will of God”* (Rom. 12:2). His will becomes our mold, and we look distinctly different. When you look closely at your lifestyle do you find stamped upon it, “Made in America,” or does it read, “Made by God?” Do our lives look more like affluent, suburban, Americans—in the things we do and value? Or do they look more like Christ—in the things He did and valued?

C. **Serve The Church (Rom. 12:3-16).** Those shaped by grace sacrifice for God, they separate from the world, and then Paul says, “They serve the church.” Beginning in verse 3 Paul spends 14 verses talking about how we are saved to serve the people of Christ. That makes sense, because Jesus’ grace is seen in how He gave Himself for the church. As Paul writes elsewhere, *“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy”* (Eph. 5:25-26). In other place he talks about *“the church of God which He bought with His own blood”* (Acts 20:28). Jesus laid down His life for the church, and He calls us to do the same. Because, that’s what grace does! Grace compels us to serve those Christ redeemed. So Paul writes in Romans 12:6

*“Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; <sup>7</sup> or service, let us use it in our service; he who teaches, in teaching; <sup>8</sup> he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.”* (Romans 12:6-8)

When we are inactive and unhelpful to the local church we are demonstrating we don’t understand grace. God gives us grace to serve the body of Christ.

1. But we may say, “I wouldn’t mind serving, but people in the church are often difficult. They don’t appreciate me. They come from difficult backgrounds than I do.” Imagine if Jesus let thoughts like that stop Him from coming to this earth! We would not have come to know grace! Grace means you serve the need, and not because the person is worthy or you are appreciated.
2. At other times we say, “Oh, I would serve the Lord’s family, but there are so many other activities going on in my life. So many people, so many events. But I’ll try to put serving the body in there somewhere.” And Paul goes on to say in verse 10, *“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another”* (Rom. 12:10). Grace doesn’t think of self first. Grace doesn’t put worldly activities above the people of God. Grace prefers to honor the needs of the saints above itself.
3. Grace shapes us into servants who use every talent we have for the good of the body of Christ ahead of all other commitments even when people don’t deserve it. Grace doesn’t make spectators, it makes servants.

D. **Share With The Lost.** But it shouldn’t surprise you that grace also changes the way we look at the lost. Beginning in verse 17 Paul spends 15 verses describing how grace affects our relationship with the lost. When we understand how God’s grace has forgiven our sin, we want so badly for other people to know this joy as well. Grace isn’t just concerned with people’s physical conditions, but with their spiritual condition. Jesus demonstrated His grace by coming to *“seek and save those who are lost”* (Luke 19:10). Those shaped by grace share the gospel of grace.

1. So Paul says, *“You live honorable in the sight of all men...as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men...[and] if your enemy hungers, feed him; if he thirsts, give him a drink. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good”* (Rom. 12:17,18,20,21). That’s grace! Grace treats people better than they deserve for their good! We do this because while we were enemies of God, Jesus laid down His life for our good.
2. Therefore we have been called to *“overcome evil with good.”* We are not called to fight back and get even. We are called to share the good news of God’s grace that can overcome every speck of evil in every single person who will yield themselves to it.

## IV. Conclusion

- A. We are all moved by the shocking massacre which took place at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown Connecticut. A lone gunman shot twenty children and six adults. The terrible evil those children and teachers witnessed is unimaginable. But, since that day we have also heard stories of courageous people who stood in the way of harm and sheltered the children in safety. We have seen a nation pour out love and compassion upon a community. The people of Newtown will be shaped by the things that happened that day, and they are going to have to make a choice. Will they be shaped by the evil that happened, or will they be shaped by the good they experienced.
- B. We all have that same choice. There are a lot of things in our past that has shaped who we are. There are a lot of things that will happen this year which can shape who we are. But, as disciples of Christ we choose for our lives to be shaped by the grace of God!
- C. We first taste His grace in salvation. When we put our faith in the cross of Christ for our forgiveness, we repent of a life lived for ourselves and this world, and we are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, when God, by His grace, removes every sin from us. Have you responded to His grace? Why not today?

—Spring Creek 1 / 13 / 13