

Series: New Mercies	Reference: Romans 12:1-14	Title: No Pain, No Gain	Date: 01.09.2022
Website Writeup:			
This four-week series explores the difficulties of change in the Christian life. Through understanding procrastination, sanctification, and the power of cultivating spiritual habits, we see the life-giving process of change in the Christian life. Change is a part of life; it will either bring us closer to God or take us further away. We will take responsibility to follow God in every season of life.			

COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

(Video up directly after announcements) Turn with me to p775 in your pew Bibles to Romans 12...No pain, no gain! A phrase stressing, growth comes painfully through hard work & sacrifice. True for both physical & spiritual growth. Relearning something you knew already over *again*, as Bret Becker had to, is physically & mentally arduous.

Romans 12:1-14 says...*Therefore, I urge you, brothers & sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy & pleasing to God - this is your true & proper worship. ²Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test & approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing & perfect will.*

Paul admonishes to present our bodies as living sacrifices, not to conform to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind. That sacrificial image relates to the Old Testament practice of offering animal sacrifices as worship. A believers life is one set apart for & in constant worship of God, which happens by the renewing of the mind.

Not conforming, allowing your mind to be transformed is difficult. It entails self-denial of what your brain & body have learned to desire, but aren't good for them. It means submission to spiritually formative practices allowing the Holy Spirit to apply Truth of God's Word to train & bring you up in righteousness & holiness. In renewal of the mind, the body follows learning to know & desire what's good. We're being rewired to walk well with God obtaining life & health on the way - living sacrifices.

Paul explains his own effort towards this end in 1 Co 9:24-27...*"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. ²⁵Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. ²⁶Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. ²⁷No, I strike a blow to my body & make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."*

Paul's intentional about his spiritual growth. The Fall had rewired us *not* to pursue God. Sin perverted & twisted our thinking & affected our bodies. The costs of our sin's been completely paid for in Christ, yet we still struggle against it in this life, suffering the lingering effects as we walk out our faith. We're in a spiritual battle for Truth including what we do in our bodies - the two are inextricably linked. We're not dualistic in our thinking. Everything's spiritual.

Spiritually we're like Bret Becker relearning what God originally created us to be. He was healthy & happy, could walk, talk & ski...until that accident. It's as if he died, totally unresponsive - but then he's brought back! Open eyes, breathing on his own, he's there but the effects of his fall still linger. He had to work to relearn what he was originally created to be.

If we look back at the created order of early Genesis, we were created to live in peace & harmony with one another & God in relationships marked by fidelity & faithfulness. But the fall left us spiritually dead. What we've become, all the vitriol & violence, isn't our originally intended state, it's sins pollution. In Christ we're brought back now relearning what we were created to be! Like Bret, we see improvement even with minimal effort put into spiritual growth. Christ entered our reality giving power & desire to return to our original state which is to His glory & our good. Effort in spiritual formation isn't to earn favor with God. Redemption & reconciliation with God was accomplished by Christ's work on the cross on our behalf. We have nothing to prove or earn, our goal's to glorify Him now.

Romans 12 continues discussing unity of believers in Christ...³For 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 faith God has distributed to each of you. ⁴For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; ⁷if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

These aren't easy things, in many respects sin's hardwired us against them. In our original state we were like mirrors reflecting God's character. But sin shattered that reflection. Now we see cracks & shards with some of that original reflection shining through. We were created to ve a detailed realistic portrait of God's reflection before, now we're more like an abstract Picasso-like representation. We know what it represents, but it's far from a right likeness! We're all broken & in need of repair but still reflect Jesus in certain ways, or at certain levels. Sanctification repairs that image. The Christian life, being changed to reflect Jesus so He may be glorified in us. We're called to allow ourselves to be changed reflecting Him more & more. But...do we like growth & change when it's painful?

Most of us would say no. One psychologist says, "The first way of approaching life is by avoiding pain & seeking pleasure. It's a very simple system. If it feels good, then eat it, take it, or do it. If it feels bad, then spit it out, get rid of it, or avoid it." But, she goes on

to encourage a different way, one that Wilfred Bion described as developing mental muscle.¹

Sinfulness makes us base & animalistic. It's only due to that reflection of God in us that humankind hasn't devolved into total destruction. Satan's glorified when we act only on self & pleasure, not allowing our minds to be renewed by God's Truth. Christian growth is *sanctification*. Theologians describe it as "a separation to God, an imputation of Christ as our holiness, purification from moral evil & conformation to the image of Christ."² It begins when we come to faith in Christ & with God setting us apart as His children (1 Corinthians 6:11). Then, God continues to transform the believer from the inside out to reflect Christ to the world.

Change doesn't happen instantly, growth takes time. The struggle's valuable, building spiritual muscle memory. It's fast food vs home-cooked meals. Fast food's quick, highly processed & unhealthy. A home-cooked meal, made in an oven or slow cooker, gives food time to marinate & absorb all flavor & nutrients, takes more time & effort, but in the end it's worth it & is better for you.

People want fast-food spirituality, answers in soundbites. To know the why of being called to obedience in an area, while not wanting to submit to the long process to have answers revealed & baked in over time. Fast-food spirituality keeps us immature & stunts growth. We say, "Too hard, too long, doesn't make sense." Then go about our business not realizing we've just added again to our spiritual waistline & fed the cancer already within us. Obedience to the Christian is like the radiation blasting the effects of cancerous sin out of the body, glorifying Jesus & bringing us further in line with God's original intent for us.

Sanctification is the life long growth of the believer, with all the complexities & messiness it entails. Difficult work relying on trust, community & an ongoing work of the Spirit. The hard work is to sometimes have to say, "I choose to believe you God, even when everything in me wants to go a different direction." Most easily seen in the young Christian called to celibacy in waiting for a spouse who shares conviction in Christ. While friends compromise doing whatever feels good in the moment. We've disconnected sex & romance from spiritual meaning, divorcing them from shared conviction & morals which glorify Jesus with life choices. The world's message is self-denial & suffering are bad, but the message of God is these things are actually beneficial & spiritually meaningful in how they reflect God to the world.

The same Spirit who raised Christ from the dead lives inside us renewing & transforming from the inside out (Romans 8:11). Sanctification isn't behavior management, rather it is transformation at the core. Instead of changing behavior, God changes thoughts, emotions & habits which in turn change behavior. By the power of the

¹ (Jennifer Kunst, "No Pain, No Gain," A Headshrinker's Guide to the Galaxy [blog], Psychology Today, May 8, 2014, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/headshrinkers-guide-the-galaxy/201405/no-pain-no-gain>).

² (Henry Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1979], 287)

Spirit, believers put to death sin & unrighteousness (Rm 8:12-13). Feelings & desires aren't the best barometer for what's good while God's wisdom & direction in the Word & leading of His Spirit are.

We grow in Christ by cultivating *spiritual disciplines*. The spiritual weights with which we train spiritual muscles. Prayer, service, study & meditation are a few practices Christians use to cultivate spiritual growth. Richard Foster describes the importance of these disciplines, saying, "Disciplines don't earn us favor with God or measure spiritual success. They're exercises which equip us to live fully & freely in the present reality of God - and God works with us, giving us grace as we learn & grow."³

Paul lists these things in such a way to reveal growth happens in community & unity of belief with others. If we have gifts we're not cultivating as individuals we rob others of benefit. They grow by exercising our gifts in community & vice-versa. If I have the gift of prophecy, giving, or teaching, but keep it to myself, what good does it benefit you? Growth happens in community. We're to think soberly of ourselves, not becoming prideful, interdependent in community, reliant on the Spirit. We have something to give, confident without being arrogant.

In all these gifts, not all come easily. Maybe none do. If some do though, our sinful nature seeks to squelch them & we must make the choice of obedience to act on them. Years ago one member of Six:Eight sold a business for a considerable sum. His wife said he had to give 10% to Six:Eight as tithe. One of the hardest things he ever had to do! But in doing so, he felt blessed in the long run. Something inexplicable happened to his being & character as a result of obedience.

Another couple who married later in life sharing how often they desired strongly to cut corners & just date outside of Christian circles, enjoy sex, or to marry someone who didn't share Christian conviction. But as painful as it was they waited not knowing if God would ever bring someone into their lives. He did & their lives are richer as a result - they can't imagine life without the other.

Paul ends with other important directives...⁹*Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.* ¹⁰*Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.* ¹¹*Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.* ¹²*Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.* ¹³*Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.* ¹⁴*Bless those who persecute you; bless & do not curse.*

We're not naturally inclined to spiritual life with Christ - these things take intentional choices. Some things come easy, others don't. Sometimes forgiveness is painful. Being hospitable can be a drudgery. One woman I know hates to have people over, but does it as a spiritual practice to show love & care is blessed. One woman shared how she had to choose to forgive her husband confessing she was using certain arguments to

³ (Richard Foster, "Spiritual Disciplines: A Practical Strategy," *Renovaré*, <https://renovare.org/about/ideas/spiritual-disciplines>)

manipulate him to get her way. She promised she wouldn't do it any longer! A hard thing to do, not knowing the result. He stood & apologized thanking her for her honesty & their relationship took a healthy step forward.

James Emery White shares some insight on all this in an article titled, "Why We Cannot Abandon Truth In The Name Of Love." Better than I could he says, "The most basic idea of truth is that which corresponds with reality. If I say it's raining outside, you can go out & see if what I said corresponds with what's real. It's either raining or not. That's the idea of truth. Not what you think is true or may want to be true, but what actually is objectively true. Meaning truth is something that stands outside of us. It exists. It is. God is truth...the source of all truth. This means truth is transcendent. Truth doesn't come from us, isn't made up or determined by us, but rather *comes* to us. That's why we speak of the Bible as God's revelation. It's God revealing Himself & truth about Himself that couldn't otherwise be known.

Truth isn't something we create, it's something we discover. It's not what we choose to believe as truth, nor determining a 51% majority vote to be truth, nor what ideologies embrace as truth. Truth *is*. Something either corresponds with reality, or it doesn't. Something corresponds with the revealed truth of God, or it doesn't. It's not a guessing game nor some subjective art. This is why people who dismiss dealing with whether something is true & say things like, "All that matters is that you're sincere," miss a very important point: You can be sincerely wrong. Hitler was.

Sincerity matters, but it can't be *all* that matters, because sincerity alone has nothing to do with reality. This is why saying things like "Well, that's your truth & I have my truth," or "What's true for you is true for you, what's true for me is true for me," or, "There's no such thing as truth, truth is whatever you want it to be" isn't being careful in our thinking. They speak as though truth doesn't exist outside of personal opinion.

As mentioned, the idea of truth is the correspondence between our ideas or perceptions & reality. What's true is that which actually *is*. If you believe that kind of objective truth doesn't exist, or that if it does it doesn't matter, you have some serious challenges to overcome. **Even a skeptic as noteworthy as Sigmund Freud had to admit that, "[If] it were really a matter of indifference what we believed, then we might just as well build our bridges of cardboard as of stone, or inject a tenth of a gramme of morphia into a patient instead of a hundredth, or take teargas as a narcotic instead of ether."**

Truth matters. Yet one of the reasons truth is being so readily abandoned in our day is because of something else that matters: love. It seems strange, but because we don't understand the interplay of truth & love, we're abandoning truth in the name of love. Here's the way the dynamic is meant to play out: The love we are meant to express can't be separated from the truth we are meant to embrace. You can't have love without truth, just as you can't have truth without love. No application of love (if it's truly love) can be at the expense of truth. If you feel love's calling you to abandon or turn a blind eye to truth, then you're misunderstanding the proper application & demonstration of love. Yet that's the plague of our day. We're sacrificing & compromising truth in the name of love.

This very issue was addressed by the apostle John in his second letter recorded for us in the New Testament. Some people were using the command to love to do away with the truth, to do away with any sense of right or wrong, to do away with any sense of doctrine or authority. In the name of love, they were abandoning firm commitments to truth. John essentially thundered in reply, “No! Love’s based on the truth! When you divorce truth from love, you don’t have love, you have lifestyles that descend into immorality & thinking which degrades into heresy.”

This is what people get wrong about something like the idea of grace - to get grace right, it’s not just about grace. When we think about grace, we think about love, forgiveness & acceptance. As well we should because that’s what grace holds. But grace isn’t just about grace. It’s part of a package & that package is grace & truth. Grace & truth go together. Inextricably intertwined. You take away truth & you don’t have grace anymore. You have a cheap, sentimental, lifeless, powerless idea which requires you to accept everybody & affirm what everybody does. You’ll never find that in the Bible, much less in the life & teaching of Jesus. No one was more loving, grace-giving & accepting than Jesus. But you’ll never find Jesus once affirming a lifestyle that goes against truth.

As John also wrote, “[Jesus] came... *full of grace & truth*” (John 1:14). As Henry Cloud has written, grace is accepting relationship. Truth is what’s real; it describes how things really are. Truth without grace is just judgment, but grace without truth is just deception. As John Stott once put it: “Our love grows soft if it isn’t strengthened by truth & our truth grows hard if it is not softened by love.”⁴ Love without truth lies, truth without love kills.

The Fall was a tragic accident rewiring us not to pursue God’s truth. Sin left us in a spiritual battle for Truth including what we do in our bodies - the two inextricably linked. Will you choose to believe God’s Truth is best for your life, intentionally engaging in spiritual growth this year towards Christ-likeness, learning to walk, talk, & live like Him again? To be renewed in your mind, live as sacrifice, returning to what you were originally created to be for the sake of God’s glory to the nations as the Great Commission calls us?

⁴ “Why We Can’t Abandon Truth In The Name Of Love,” by James Emery White