

“Rich in Grace” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Pentecost 13 August 23, 2026

- I. **Romans 11:33-12:8** – with a particular emphasis on Romans 12:1-3
- II. **I read an excerpt from a book called**, *John for Everyone*, by theologian and author N.T. Wright.
 - a. He said, “A friend of mine described the reaction when he went home, as a young teenager, and announced to his mother that he’d become a Christian. Alarmed, she thought he’d joined some kind of cult.
 - i. “They’ve brainwashed you!” she said.
 - ii. He was ready with the right answer. “If you’d seen what was in my brain, you’d realize it needed washing!”
 - iii. Of course, he hadn’t been brainwashed.
 - iv. In fact, again and again—and this was certainly the case with my friend—when people bring their lives, their outer lives and inner lives, into the light of Jesus the Messiah, things begin to come clear.
 - v. If anything, it’s our surrounding culture that brainwashes us, persuading us in a thousand subtle ways that the present world is the only one there is.
 - 1. This is seldom argued.
 - 2. Rather, a mood is created in which it seems so much easier to go with the flow... That’s what happens in brainwashing.
 - 3. What the gospel does is to administer a sharp jolt, to shine a bright light, to kick-start the brain, and the moral sensibility, into working properly for the first time.¹
 - b. As Paul writes that we should not be conformed to this world, he means that we resist the pressure that is constantly upon us to conform... to become like the world and what it calls normal.
 - c. The Scriptures often talk about “the world” or the present age in the negative, as we are called to resist the evil that predominates and reflect Christ instead.
 - i. As Paul reflects on the world, he says it is foolish, evil, blind... and he names the sins that are part of the old ways many Christians behaved, but the expectation is we no longer partake in these activities... this brokenness and sin.
 - ii. Anything that was going on in Paul’s day is still going on today when it comes to sin – and perhaps more than ever, we are pressured into conforming to the world.
 - d. It seems easy enough to name the ways we see outright sins against God – stealing... murder... adultery... but Christians can be subtly pressed into conforming with the world.
 - i. In the present evil age, we are bombarded with hundreds of different viewpoints from the media... online news, social media posts, written

articles, podcasts, and whatever ways people can get you to hear them out... and their wisdom and purpose are not always of God.

1. It's a tall order, but we cannot constantly ingest this content and not be subtly conformed to their viewpoints... as many of these companies and personalities have agendas to change your beliefs.
 - a. For example, we see things on advertisements today that would have been outright banned 20 years ago, but slowly, over time, these companies have gained the ability to put things out there we should be ashamed to see.
 - b. But that's the point, right? We become callous to the world's sin, and it becomes just another part of our lives.
- ii. Another example besides media is the pressure to act like everyone else... even when we are Christians!
 1. I can't remember where I read it, but one person said that some Christian leaders are so excited for growth in their churches, but it comes because the churches have become no different than the world around them!
 2. The church tries to be relevant by being like the people in the world, but in doing that we become irrelevant.
 - a. People who don't know Jesus need to hear that things can be and should be different from the world they came to know and embrace... the world that had once claimed them.
 3. It's an accusation we should all think about – that oftentimes, Christians go to church on Sundays, but the rest of their week has no meaningful differences from the folks who don't believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior.
- e. More often than not, we struggle against a constant pressure to conform to the world... and it's a little like our kids as they bug us every day for some candy until we finally just roll our eyes and give in... but one piece of candy will never be enough... and the world will never stop seeking to claim you.

III. **Our reading in Romans** is stating that we, as believers, are different.

- a. As those chosen by God through our baptisms and faith, we are no longer conformed to the world but transformed through the renewal of our minds.
- b. The power of the Gospel brought us to faith, and we could do nothing to receive this gift with our own power or desire.
 - i. Yes, Paul repeatedly points out throughout this letter to the Romans that we are brought to faith by God's power, and that Jesus Christ is the only way that we can have this transformation.
 - ii. Following all the rules – the Law – was once thought to be the way, but in the new covenant, God shows us the way is through faith in Jesus alone.

- iii. So, as Jesus was sent into the world, He became the perfect sacrifice that the Law always required... the unblemished Lamb that would pour out His blood as a propitiation – an atonement – a payment for our sins.
- iv. And make no mistake, every one of us was conceived and born in that sin – which had no solution or way out – except through the sacrifice of Jesus.
- c. As we come to believe in Jesus Christ through our baptism and faith, the great blessing is our sins are forgiven... the world no longer claims us... and by God's grace, we become His very own child.
 - i. Certainly, people think that's far too easy – and I guess that's just the nature of grace... we can't earn it, and it is a pure gift.
 - ii. Our God is so rich in grace that He sent His own Son... so that the world would not take us... but instead we would overcome the world.

IV. **In this rich grace, we now live our lives for Him.**

- a. We are transformed by the renewal of our minds... so that we can figure out what's best in how we live.
- b. In humility, we don't see others as less than... we see them in light of Christ... and how all people are equal at the foot of the cross.
 - i. We don't vie for power and position in God's kingdom, we take the role of a servant... and a person who leads with love.
 - ii. The sacrifice of Christ on the cross becomes our precious motivation as we take up our cross and follow Him.
- c. Your brain, your mind has been washed clean, and we resist the constant pressure from the world around us to claim us again... to be conformed to the ways that seem wise to those who do not know God.
 - i. Instead, we have a "spiritual worship" going on in our daily lives that shows outwardly the inward change that God made by His grace.
- d. We rarely get to see someone come to church like a Paul, who rejected God and His grace, but then was miraculously changed to follow Christ with all his heart and strength.
 - i. Yet, the truth is, we are all like Paul... the chief of sinners... with no hope without God and His grace... yet, we were given the ultimate gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation.
 - ii. God even gives us all the tools we need to discern His will – the Scriptures, our time in worship, and our connection with other Christians – as we resist conforming to the world, and embrace sacrificing our bodies in response to God... our Redeemer and Savior.
- e. We all needed the Gospel to come around from the darkness and sin of the world, and through God's grace, we clearly see how He washes not only our brains, but our whole body, mind, and soul with the cleansing power of Jesus' blood and righteousness.

- i. As the pressure from the world is never ending, I encourage you to spend more time leaning into God and His Word... being with your fellow Christians... and then, sharing the wonderful Gospel message with those who are dying without Jesus....
- ii. Praise be to God for the transformation in our lives... Amen.

¹ Source: N. T. Wright, *John for Everyone, Part 1* (WJK, 2004), pp. 43-44.