
“From Doxology to Life”

ROMANS 12:1

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AT A GLANCE

To you know what worship is? No, really? Do you know what the bible calls worship? Spoiler alert: it's not just singing. In fact, it's not even primarily singing. It's way more than that! Check it out!

INTRODUCTION

I'd like to begin with a missionary update. Pastor Andy informed me that just last Monday one our newly supported missionary couples, whose initials are C & C, left for their mission in Southeast Asia. I know it's vague, but we must protect their identity and location. It's because we're committed to supporting and sending people to the hardest to reach people on the planet.

Six years ago only 11% of our missionaries worked among unreached people. Today that number is 56%! More than half of our supported and sent missionaries are doing the hardest work on the planet – taking the gospel to people who have never had access to it. We do this because it is not right that there are people around the world who do not worship the Creator God, our Heavenly Father. We're committed to sending people to every unreached people group we can. It's your giving that makes that happen. Your giving is putting missionaries on the ground in places that no missionary has been able to take the gospel yet. Thank you, church!

We do more than send money, though. We send people. We equip people and we send them. And we believe every member should live with a missionary mindset. “Lord, wherever you take me or leave me, that's my mission field. I'm going to serve you wholeheartedly wherever I am.” That's what we mean by *every member a missionary*.

We also have a goal of sending 50 of our own people to the nations in the next 20+ years. Some of you who are hearing this today will answer that call to go and you will be right to answer it. God's glory over all the earth, that's what we're here for. To Him be glory forever. Amen.

Those were the final words of Paul's doxology, which we studied last week. Today, we move into the final major section in Romans, chapters 12-16. We call this section “Fellowship.” Paul tell us how you and I ought to live in the world and with one another in light of the doctrine of salvation he presented in chapters 1-11.

We begin with an appeal. It's an appeal to lay it all on the line for God. And it's an appeal that must be the foundation of the mission of Wildwood Church. If we do not live this way, we'll never achieve the vision we believe the Lord has called us to.

ROMANS 12:1

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

AN APOSTOLIC APPEAL

He says, **I appeal to you therefore, brothers.** First, let's note Paul did not say, "I command you." This isn't a harsh rebuke. The word appeal comes from *parakaleo*, the same root from which we get the word for the Holy Spirit, our helper. It means to come alongside and encourage. This is a heart-felt plea.

Second, it's a petition to his **brothers.** These are people Paul identifies as his fellow co-heirs with Christ. (8:17) They are believers. God has adopted them, made them fellow heirs, and given them new life in Christ. Now Paul wants them to live out of what is already true. It is only because of God's mercy that they can be called brothers.

Thus, he appeals to them **by the mercies of God.** God has been abundantly merciful to them. By appealing to them by the mercies of God, he's reminding the reader that every person who inherits eternal life does so only because of God's mercy, which was his final doctrinal statement, "*For God has consigned all to disobedience that he may have mercy on all.*" *Romans 11:32* This led him into doxology in verses 33-36, which crescendoed with "To Him be glory forever. Amen."

FROM DOXOLOGY TO LIFE

Paul says, **therefore**, which links what proceeds (how we live) with what precedes (what God has done for us). (11:36) Last week we discovered that right doctrine leads to right worship. Well, there's another link, right worship leads to right living.

If we agree with Paul's doctrine, and if we join him in doxology, then we will therefore live. Doxology leads to life. Our lives will reflect this internal reality. Our doxology finds its fullest expression not in the words we speak or the songs we sing on Sunday mornings, but in something else.

Paul's appeal to his brothers is **to present your bodies as a living sacrifice.** Our doxology works its way out not in the force of our singing, but in the faithfulness of our living. The word Paul used here for **present** is the same word used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint to describe a priest laying an offering on the altar.

Paul is inviting us to lay our bodies on the altar. But not as a sacrifice. A sacrificial offering died. But blood sacrifices are no longer effective and no longer necessary because Christ, the Lamb of God slain for us, became the final sacrifice. He died for our sins once and for all.

Thus, Paul urges us to present **our bodies as a living sacrifice**, to lay our lives down, to surrender totally and completely to God's will. All our lives spilled out as an offering upon the altar of His mercy and grace.

This, Paul says, is **your spiritual worship**: total commitment; lives totally lived for Him. The word Paul uses here translated spiritual worship is one Greek word, *latreia*, which means "service." It has to do with a priestly service to God.

WHAT IS WORSHIP?

I'm concerned that many people today have no idea what worship really is. If I polled our congregation and asked, "What is worship?" My guess is that many would respond that worship is what we do before the sermon. We worship when we sing. But while singing can be worship, worship is much more than singing.

Worship is not as we define it but as the bible defines it. Here in Romans 12:1 we see perhaps the single greatest, clearest definition of worship in the bible. Worship is laying down your body as a living sacrifice. This is **holy and acceptable to God.**

Throughout the Old Testament we read of profane, cheap, hypocritical sacrifices offered to God. Did God accept them? Did they please Him? Here's what He said through Malachi, *"When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor?" says the LORD of hosts.*" Malachi 1:8

They offered to God what they would never offer to human authorities and God despised it. How grievous when we give other men the best parts of our lives; our loyalty, our effort, our devotion, our praise, and then give God the scraps. If you gave your employer, your friends, or your spouse the kind of service you give to God, would they accept it? The idea that God would accept just any token of our worship is naive.

We have been declared holy by God, made righteous by Christ. Because of this, we are able to offer to God a sacrifice holy and acceptable. But consider the hypocrisy of one saying, "Because I have been made holy by God and given His riches of grace and kindness, I can be careless, flippant, and apathetic about what I bring to God in sacrifice." Here's my concern: brothers and sisters walk into the Worship Center and attend a worship service and they walk out believing they have worshipped.

Worship does take place in this building, no doubt. But this is not the only place, and by nature not even the primary place, of worship for a believer. Nevertheless, I think many Christians have no idea what worship is and thus they leave here each week believing they have offered to God holy and acceptable spiritual worship.

IDOLATRY

To understand what spiritual worship really is, it may be helpful to understand what false worship is, what we call "idolatry." According to the New City Catechism, "Idolatry is trusting in created things rather than the Creator for our hope and happiness, significance and security."

What idolatry reveals is that worship is much more than singing. Worship is giving oneself wholly and completely to something. What we hope in and what we look to for happiness, significance, and security, we worship. And what we worship, we serve.

For some, what they call worship is 25 minutes of singing a couple Sundays a month. But if that's all there is, that's not worship. That's singing. Worship is giving your life to something. For Christians, true **spiritual worship** is giving our lives to God in service. It is finding our hope and happiness in Him. It is hoping in God, finding our happiness in God, being so secure in Him that we are eager to serve Him with our whole lives. It's knowing that the most significant purpose of our lives is His glory.

SHALLOW THEOLOGY REPLACES GOD

It's no wonder Paul spent 11 chapters on doctrine before he addressed worship. Tony Reinke asserts, "Shallow thinking about God always replaces God, and sets in his place a fraudulent idol of security or sex or wealth or power or even of religion." Paul must have understood this. He could have began with worship and ended with doctrine. The reformers understood this reality, which is precisely why they countered shallow theology with deep.

They confronted not only relics and rituals but also false doctrines about God and about salvation. Perhaps one of the most insidious threats is the idol of a supposed Christian god of our own making. People effectively form and fashion a god so that it accepts their brand of religion, their particular rituals, the things that they like to do. That god accepts that worship with a smile, a wink, and a nod.

That god says if you'll pray your way, sing your way, have the relics of your choosing, if you'll kneel here, bow there, if you'll raise your hands or sit on them, if you'll perform the way you're

comfortable performing, I'll send you some blessings. If you can master these catchphrases or if you can muster intense emotion, or refrain from it altogether, then you can unlock the next level of blessing from me. I'm afraid so much of what passes as worship is nothing more than idolatrous worship of a god made in man's image, baptized in Christian language.

DOESN'T GOD LOVE JUST ANY WORSHIP WE OFFER?

Some might think, c'mon man, God accepts whatever worship I give Him. I want you to hear how seriously our God takes true worship. *"I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."* Amos 5:21-24

What matters to God is not feasts and sacrifices and music. It's not emotion or piety or ritual. What matters to God is that we submit ourselves to Him, that we serve Him, that we do what He wants instead of doing what we want and expecting Him to bless us for it. Paul says, **spiritual worship**, which is **holy and acceptable to God**, is offering your bodies as a **living sacrifice**.

OUR LIVING SACRIFICE, IMITATING THE SUPREME SACRIFICE

What is implied in that statement? **Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice**? I think we can go to Ephesians 5:1-19 and see very clearly what it means to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice. Paul begins verse 1 with worship language and ends with worship language in verse 19, so I would argue everything in between is also worship language. *"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."* Ephesians 5:1-2

Let's begin by noting that any sacrifice we make for God is only imitating the supremely greater sacrifice that God made for us, namely in the person of Christ through His death on the cross. This, Paul says, was a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. And now, He is the model of worship for us. He's the One we imitate. Christ died for us that we would live for Him. Thus, Paul's appeal is not that we sacrifice ourselves, but that we offer our bodies as a *living* sacrifice.

What follows, I believe captures the essence of that statement: *"But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God."* Ephesians 5:3-5

SEXUAL IMMORALITY

Right off the bat, we see that spiritual worship eliminates sexual immorality. Paul says elsewhere that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and every other sin we commit outside the body, but sexual sin we commit against the body. (1 Corinthians 6:18) Sexual sin uses our bodies not for service to the Lord, but for service to ourselves. We are hard pressed to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice while also engaging in sin with our bodies.

Every time we resist the temptation to click, to view, to touch, to engage in sexual immorality, in pornography, in lust, in adultery, in fornication we are offering our bodies as a living sacrifice, we are worshipping the Lord.

"Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to

discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." Ephesians 5:6-14

LIGHTS IN THE WORLD

Paul is describing how we are to live in a dark world; the practices we ought participate in and the ones we ought to expose. The people we ought to associate with and allow to influence us and the ones we ought to avoid. The business partners. The friends. It's the music we listen to, the movies and TV shows we consume.

Whenever we influence others rather than being influenced by them; when we live as children of light in the darkness, exposing the deception of the world rather than foolishly embracing it, even under the supposed virtue of "tolerance;" when we live awake in the world with Christ shining on us because we've spent time on our knees in prayer and we've gone to the Word to nourish our souls; when we say to the world, "repent" rather than "how neat!" we are worshipping the Lord.

"Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." Ephesians 5:15-16

WISE STEWARDSHIP OF TIME

As I said in my time management class, part of Relationships 101, how we use our time matters to God because He has a purpose for our lives. Paul says, *"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."* Ephesians 2:10 When we determine to use our time wisely, asking the Lord to lead us according to His will; when we lean not on our own understanding but trust in the Lord (Proverbs 3:5-6); when we determine to "do all things to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31); when we live lives surrendered to His will and we invite Him to infiltrate every area of our lives and to do with us what He wills, we are worshipping the Lord.

RESIST ESCAPISM

"And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit," Ephesians 5:18 When we seek not to escape by getting drunk but instead we seek to be more present, more aware, more in tune, by being filled with the Holy Spirit; when we exercise self-control, whether with wine, or food, or whatever it is we go to to escape, when we live sober lives with sober minds, we are worshipping the Lord.

Now that we've gone through all of that imitating Christ's sacrifice by offering our bodies as living sacrifices through sexual purity, walking circumspectly, submitting whole-heartedly, and living soberly, now we finally get to singing. Paul concludes with, *"addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ."* Ephesians 5:19-21

SINGING, AT LAST

Finally, we come to the worship service. Finally, we come to the Sunday gathering. Finally, we get to church. We've gone from Sunday evening when the high of the weekend is over and we want to extend that high and we want to open the laptop or the smart phone in the dark room and we choose instead to fight our flesh and resist that impure urge for the glory of God. We've worshipped!

Then we moved to the weekday in the work force or the school classroom or the world at large, and we've determined that we're going to shine as lights in the darkness, and we've awakened each morning on purpose asking Christ to shine on us and reflect His glory through us that day and walk with us so that we do what He wants us to do. We've worshipped!

And we've come to the weekend and decided that we're going to stay sober-minded, to enjoy His gifts without abusing them, and we're going to ask the Lord to fill us anew so that we can enter the gathering on Sunday with joy and peace. We've worshipped!

And after all of that worship, we finally get to the worship service on Sunday morning and our singing joins with all of those other acts of worship in a chorus of praise and our singing likewise becomes an offering holy and acceptable to God because we've laid down our bodies as a living sacrifice.

FROM TIME TO TIME, WE'RE GOING TO BLOW IT

You know, some days we're going to have regrets. We're going to blow it. We're going to fail to worship on a Thursday in our workplace. We're going to feel that opportunity to speak the truth, or we're going to laugh as a joke we know is wrong, we're going to capitulate to the peer-pressure. We're going to be apathetic and selfish on a Saturday. We're going to speak a harsh word on a Monday. At some moment we're going to forget that all of our life is about service to God.

We're going to engage in something we wish we hadn't. And we're going to wonder, may I join with my church in worship? The enemy is going to whisper in your ear, "Will your God even receive it now?" And we're going to fight the enemy with the Word of God. *"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."* Psalm 51:17 And we're going to gather this way, with contrite hearts and a broken spirit.

When we've blown it during the week we're going to gather on Sunday anyway, not with a guilty conscience, but with a contrite heart, confident about our identity in Christ as beloved children of God. We're clothed in the righteousness of Christ and no matter what we've done to blow it, we're gathering with the saints on the Lord's Day with gratitude in our hearts and repentance on our lips.

And we're determined that our week-day worship, even when it's not perfect, is going to be manifested in heart-felt singing, sincere praise, and service in His name as we gather with our church. When we do this, then, brothers, our singing will truly be worship. Because our worship will be more than singing; it will be offering our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God...this is our spiritual worship! Amen?

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