

# WHAT IS WORSHIP?

How would you define worship?

If someone were to ask you “How can I worship God?” what would you say?

Read Romans 12:1-2

According to this passage what is the reason that we should worship?

What do you think are some of the wrong reasons that Christians have for worshipping?

What do you think it means to be a “living sacrifice”?

How is being transformed by the renewing of our minds part of our worship?

Where do you think what we do on a Sunday fits into this description of worship?

If you were to take Romans 12:1-2 seriously how should it change your time at church and your life outside of church?

In light of this passage, how would you define Christian worship?

## Leader's Notes What is Worship? Ephesians Romans 12:1-2

*How would you define worship?*

As we begin our series on worship it will be good to understand the basics of where your group is at in their understanding of worship. Try not to correct anyone on their definition of worship, hopefully this study will give the group some clarity, so now is just the time to listen.

*If someone were to ask you "How can I worship God?" what would you say?*

This question is also designed to help you gauge where your group is at in their understanding of worship. While the previous question was about the theory of worship, this is about what worship is in practise. We will see in this study, and throughout this series, that worship is much more than just the singing we do in church. Worship should encompass the whole life of the believer. Your group's answers to this question also should indicate how full their understanding of worship is.

*Read Romans 12:1-2*

*According to this passage what is the reason that we should worship?*

Verse one gives us a very clear motivation for worship. First the verse begins, "Therefore...". As always, whenever you see a therefore in the Bible you should ask "What is the therefore there for?" In this case Paul is referring back to everything that has come before in the book of Romans. Romans 12:1 is the transition from the theology of God and salvation to the practical outworking of them. Paul is saying, "In light of everything you have seen about the terrible wrath and radical grace of God, this is how you should now live."

The next thing that Paul says is "in view of God's mercy". This is very similar to the function of "therefore", however he is making clear exactly what it is that should be motivating us, it is God's merciful character and actions. Paul has made it clear in chapters 1-3 how deserving we are of God's wrath. In Chapters 4-11 he has explained the implications of his grace for Jews and Gentiles and how we can be saved through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

It is because of this, God's great mercy to us in his Son Jesus Christ, that we should live out our "true and proper worship."

*What do you think are some of the wrong reasons that Christians have for worshipping?*

Spend some time discussing what some wrong motivations for worship may be. These may include guilt ("I better do this to keep God happy"), social pressure ("Everyone else is doing it"), emotion ("I love the feeling I get when I worship") or religious action ("This is what being a Christian is"). Paul is clear that the reason for worship should be motivated by who God is and what he has done, rather than by any other reason. This does not mean that there are not benefits to worship for the believer, but they should not be the primary motivation for worship.

*What do you think it means to be a "living sacrifice"?*

Paul has created a deliberate oxymoron here. A sacrifice to ancient readers would have been dead. The shedding of blood and the loss of life was an essential part in most ancient sacrificial practices. So to be a living sacrifice seems contradictory. Paul is saying that just as an animal's life was offered up to God as part of Israelite worship, now we must offer ourselves to God, not through death but through giving our whole lives to God. We are now dead to ourselves and our own desires and we live to serve God.

This idea means that worship is not just about what we do in church. A much greater portion of our worship is about what we do outside of church. Being a living sacrifice means that we

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can worship God in every area of our life as we give it over to him. Our obedience is an act of worship. The way we love others is an act of worship. How we go about our work and study is an act of worship. Everything we do should be given over to God for his glory; this is what it means to be a living sacrifice. Worship is an all-of-life activity.

*How is being transformed by the renewing of our minds part of our worship?*

Paul is showing a new way to live in this passage. To live for God, as a living sacrifice, requires a whole new way of thinking. The world tells us that we are the most important people and that we should live for ourselves. To be able to live in such a radically different way requires transformation by the renewing of our minds. When this happens we will be able to “test and approve what God’s will is.” This means that we will be able to better serve God as living sacrifices because we know how to best serve Him.

What does it mean to have a renewed mind? While Paul doesn’t spell it out here, he does discuss similar things in other places. In Ephesians 4 Paul mentions that the Ephesians were taught “to be made new in the attitude of [their] minds” when they were taught “in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.” Meaning that as we discover who Jesus is, we discover who we can be. Knowing Jesus means becoming like Jesus. We meet Jesus in God’s word and God’s word is made real to us through the Holy Spirit. In Colossians 3:16 Paul urges his readers to “Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly” so that they might encourage each other in their love for God.

To be transformed by the renewing of our minds we must let God’s truth, the knowledge of Christ, dwell in us, so that it can counteract the lies of the world. We will know God’s truth by his word, through his Spirit, and when it is shared among his people. When we have this we will be able to live sacrificial lives, lives of true and proper worship.

*Where do you think what we do on a Sunday fits into this description of worship?*

This passage does not mean that the worship of God’s gathered people should be ignored or done away with. There are many commands in both the Old and New Testaments for God’s people to worship together. This worship is done through song, through teaching, through prayer, through the sacraments and through the fellowship of believers. We do all these things together in response to God’s mercy. It is good for God’s people to worship together, it is the expected practice when Christians get together (Colossians 3:15-17). However, the gathered worship of the Body of Christ should not be the sum total of a believer’s worship, but merely the natural outcome when a group of worshippers gather together. To worship God in church but to refuse to obey him in the rest of life dishonours him. Our gathered worship only has value if it is the overflow of our scattered worship. A.W. Tozer puts it like this: “I can offer no worship wholly pleasing to God if I know that I am harboring elements in my life that are displeasing to Him. I cannot truly and joyfully worship God on Sunday and not worship Him on Monday. I cannot worship God with a glad song on Sunday and then knowingly displease Him in my business dealings on Monday and Tuesday.”

In Isaiah 1 God expresses his anger at empty worship and calls on his people to live a life that honours him so their worship might be acceptable to him:

11 “The multitude of your sacrifices—  
what are they to me?” says the Lord.  
“I have more than enough of burnt offerings,  
of rams and the fat of fattened animals;  
I have no pleasure  
in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.  
12 When you come to appear before me,  
who has asked this of you,  
this trampling of my courts?  
13 Stop bringing meaningless offerings!  
Your incense is detestable to me.  
New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations—

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I cannot bear your worthless assemblies.  
14 Your New Moon feasts and your appointed festivals  
I hate with all my being.  
They have become a burden to me;  
I am weary of bearing them.  
15 When you spread out your hands in prayer,  
I hide my eyes from you;  
even when you offer many prayers,  
I am not listening.  
Your hands are full of blood!  
16 Wash and make yourselves clean.  
Take your evil deeds out of my sight;  
stop doing wrong.  
17 Learn to do right; seek justice.  
Defend the oppressed.  
Take up the cause of the fatherless;  
plead the case of the widow.

What we do on Sundays in church must be reflection of the life we live outside of church. All of life is worship: our songs, prayers, teaching, and sharing all honour God if in the rest of our lives we strive to do the same.

*If you were to take Romans 12:1-2 seriously how should it change your time at church and your life outside of church?*

The great thing is that we are not compelled to worship God so that he might love us. We can worship God because he has loved us. To best do this we must be transformed by the renewing of our minds. We must dwell on the truth of God's kindness to us in his Son Jesus. The more we understand Christ, his character - his kindness, his grace, his mercy - the more motivation we have to live lives that honour God, and the more we will know how to live lives that honour God.

Knowing of God's mercy to us in Jesus can transform our worship. We can sing because we know the wrath from which we have been saved, and the grace that has saved us. We can listen to the word preached so that we might know, understand and serve this beautiful God who has saved us, we can serve each other because we know how much God has served us.

When we leave church we can live lives that are free from the pressure of having to live up to our own standards of success, because now we no longer live for ourselves. God's goals are our goals, God's kingdom is our desire, God's love is our aim, God's mercy is our motivation. Being a living sacrifice should transform how we view ourselves (we are not our own) and how view our lives (we live for God). Romans 12:1-2, if taken seriously, changes everything.

Discuss with your group, exactly what, practically, they would like to change because of Romans 12:1-2.

*In light of this passage, how would you define Christian worship?*

Spend some time discussing a new definition of worship. You may like to write it down so that you can refer to it throughout the rest of the series. One definition that takes into account Romans 12:1-2 is this: Christian worship is about living your whole life in response to the actions and character of God.