

How to Worship God

Scripture Text: Romans 12:1-2

Introduction

How do you build a house? As I understand it, you will need to first plan it. You will need to acquire the right materials. You will also need to create a good, solid foundation. Then, once that is in place, you will build upon that foundation, adding layer upon layer, putting together a frame, and working toward the finished product. The same is true for Paul's letter to the Romans. Paul has built a solid foundation. He has poured the concrete, laid brick upon brick, layer upon layer, to create for us a strong base for how we ought to live as followers of Jesus Christ. What he has been building is a strong spiritual house that will glorify God. The point to all that God has revealed to us, the grand purpose for all of Paul's theology, is to bring glory to God. It is about worship!

At the end of chapter eleven, Paul broke out in praise to God. After spending much time describing various aspects of the gospel — our sin condition and God's mercy and grace to save us from it — Paul ended that section of the letter with a hymn of praise to God. Since all that has been said up to now is true about God, and because God is worthy of our praise, Paul praised Him. Now, we are in chapter twelve and it and the next few chapters take a different direction as Paul describes how we practically live as followers of Jesus Christ. Paul now describes how the Church ought to live out the gospel. In these first two verses of chapter twelve, Paul summarized the concept of being all in for Jesus Christ. He described the way we worship God, how to live as disciples of Jesus Christ, and what it means to live in such a way that pleases God.

Be A Living Sacrifice to God

If you had something important to say to someone, what would you do? You would tell that person. If you had something really important to say to someone, you would urge them to listen. There is a sense of urgency in Paul's statement in these verses. Following the description of God's plan of redemption in the previous chapters, Paul urged his readers to action. But this action is costly. Giving glory to God is worship, and true worship means giving our whole lives completely to God. Look at the first verse.

Romans 12:1 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.*

Anytime you see the word "therefore", you know it connects with what was just said. In this case, it points back to everything Paul has written from the beginning of the letter. Paul urged his readers, in light of our condition and God's mercy and grace to us, that we should respond in a certain way to God. If someone gave you something you did not deserve, what would you do? Hopefully you would be grateful. In the case of an eternal gift, like salvation, you should be eternally grateful. Has not God been good to you? Has He not been merciful to you? If that is true, how should you respond to Him?

The appropriate response to God's mercy and grace is sacrifice. To sacrifice something means to give it up. What have you given up for God? What have you sacrificed for Him? Imagine the Old Testament sacrificial system. If you lived during that time, you might bring a lamb, a goat, or a bird and sacrifice it on the altar of God. The priest would slaughter the animal according to the way God prescribed in the Law to make a sacrifice for your sin. Fortunately, we no longer have to sacrifice animals for our sin. A greater sacrifice has come on our behalf. Jesus Christ, God's sacrificial Lamb, willingly offered Himself as the ultimate sacrifice for our sin. His body was placed on the altar of the cross and His blood was shed for the forgiveness of our sins. By Jesus' sacrificial death, our debt to God was paid in full. We must only accept it and receive this gift.

But what does Paul mean by urging us to be a "living sacrifice"? This is not the same as the Old Testament sacrificial system. The sacrifices of the new covenant through Jesus Christ do not involve killing animals for our sin. It does not involve an altar or legal obligation. It *does* involve something very costly, though. It involves giving one's own self to serve God. Those who respond to God's grace and mercy and choose to follow Jesus Christ are to dedicate themselves wholly to God. They are to give themselves entirely to God because of His saving grace. To be a living sacrifice does not mean to put to death like the animal sacrifices before, but we are to be *dead to sin* and *alive in Christ*. We are to offer ourselves completely to God, putting off the old person and putting on the new person that is in a new covenant relationship with Jesus Christ. This is similar to what Paul wrote earlier in chapter six of the letter. Look at the following.

Romans 6:12–13 ¹² *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.* ¹³ *Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.*

Christians are to offer themselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life. When it says "present yourself to God", it means *all of you*. This means your desires, your time, your talents, and your treasures. God does not want part of you. He wants all of you. This is how we worship God. Our worship means dedicating our whole lives to living for the glory of God. This worship is not in singular acts of neatly separated or compartmentalized sections of your daily lives. Our worship includes offering our whole life to God. That is why we should emphasize worship as a lifestyle, as a way of life, and not just segmented times in our life. There is not a praise and worship time while we are gathered as the Church, because whatever we do, we ought to do it for the glory of God. Those who follow Jesus Christ do not now worship in a physical temple like before, but are themselves the temple of God (1 Corinthians 6:19). We offer ourselves wholly to God because God has made us a holy people and He now dwells within us. This is pleasing to the One Who saved us and to Whom we belong.

Do Not be Conformed to the World

The next verse in this passage tells us how we can offer ourselves as living sacrifices. Those who follow Jesus Christ are to be different from non-Christian society. I once

heard someone say that he wanted to find out just how much he needed to do in order to be right with God. Basically, he wanted to do just enough, be different just enough, to be right with God. Sometimes we have no problem saying “no” to many of the things of the world, but we have to go much deeper than that. Let us look at the verse two.

Romans 12:2 ² *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

This verse includes two commands — the first is a negative; the second is a positive. The first means to be a living sacrifice for Jesus Christ is for us to not conform to this world. Christians are to live as citizens of a different world. As citizens of heaven we are to “set [our] minds on things above, not on earthly things” (Colossians 3:2). This earthly world cannot, and must not, serve as a model for Christian living. Its values and goals are against our growth in holiness. Just watch or read the news and you will have no trouble believing that. Just see what issues our society is discussing or what things people are saying is “right” and you will see that this world is not the model for Christian behavior. And yet, many Christians are confused and yielding to the things of this world. Some are saying “yes” to what God has clearly said “no”. If God has called it a sin, then we need to stay away from it. Look at what the Apostle Peter wrote in his first letter.

1 Peter 1:14–15 ¹⁴ *As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance,* ¹⁵ *but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct...*

As obedient children, God has called us to be holy. Many people are conforming to the immorality of this world, rather than faithfully obeying God. The Church is called to stand out from the world, not join in its depravity. The Church ought to be holy, which means to be set apart, to show that we are indeed different from the world. If the Church is just like the world, then why in the world would they want to be in the Church? Jesus said that we are to be salt and light in this world (Matthew 5:13–14), purifying and enlightening our culture. And yet, Christians want to court the world and be like it because it is fun or because it will bring more people into a church. Growth is measured by how close we are getting to Christ, how much more like Him we are becoming. Breaking with this world results in a life that is “good and acceptable and perfect”. The greatest threat to the Church is not hostility to it, but conformity. We will by nature conform to something. What will it be? Will it be this world or will it be Jesus Christ?

Be Transformed by Renewal

Rather than allowing the world to squeeze you into its own mold, Paul told believers to be “transformed by the renewing of your minds”. We are to not conform to the pattern of the world, but rather, we are to be transformed. The transformation of which Paul mentioned is not a change affected from without but a radical change that begins deep within ourselves. It involves our minds. Divers and gymnasts know that where their head goes, the rest of their bodies will follow. Usually, what you are thinking leads to what you

will be doing. If you think bad thoughts, you will usually do bad things. Likewise, if you think good thoughts, you will usually do good things. Look at verse two again.

Romans 12:2 ² ...*be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

One thing we ought to notice about this act of transformation that Paul mentioned is that it must be done by something or someone else. It is something that is being done to us. Much of this work of transformation is the Holy Spirit working within us, conforming us to the mind of Christ. Once you receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, the Holy Spirit begins working in your life to mold you into the image of Jesus. Now, you can hinder the Holy Spirit's work. You can grieve the Holy Spirit. Saying "no" to God's work in your life will lead to frustration. It will bring pain and suffering. We must allow ourselves to be transformed. This is not a work that we do, although we have to be that "living sacrifice" to God. If we do not give ourselves *completely* to God, then we are not totally breaking from the world and we will not experience the total transformation He desires. The idea of being transformed is like that of metamorphosis. Think of a caterpillar transforming into a beautiful butterfly. The caterpillar becomes something completely different.

This transformation involves a changed mind. Change must begin with our minds. What you think about God matters. What you think about your relationship to Him matters. How you think about the world and your place in it matters. We have to discern what is useful and what is not. We must be careful what we read, watch and listen. If you put junk into your mind, you can expect junk to come out from your body. It is like a computer. If you program a computer with good stuff, good things will result. If you program it with junk, that is what you can expect. You will never truly transform without the renewing of your mind. So, where is your head going? Is it going somewhere good, or somewhere bad? The next question is how do you renew your mind? The tool by which this work is done, is largely God's Holy Word. As we memorize scripture, meditate on God's Word, learn it and practice it, our thinking will change. The more you study God's Word and the more time you spend in prayer with it, the more you will be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ.

Lastly, what is the purpose of our renewal? What is the reason for our transformation? It is to discern the will of God. The result of a transformed life is a commitment to God and the power to perceive what God's will is. God's will is what is good and acceptable and perfect. God's will is also the best place for any of us to be. It is where you should be. If you are outside of God's will, you are not where you belong. Do you know what God's will is for your life? Do you know what God's will is for your church? What is God telling you to do? How are we to discern these things unless we are fully committed to Christ? How are we to discern God's will unless we are being transformed into being more like Jesus Christ? How can we know the will of God by chasing after our own desires and what the world says we should do? The answer is we cannot. We must stop conforming to the world and become more like Jesus Christ. We have to decide what is more important: what God wants or what we want. How much are you willing to sacrifice for God in your life and in the life of the church? God wants total commitment, nothing less.

Conclusion

In closing, this passage gives a call for total commitment. We are to be totally committed to Jesus Christ. Our commitment to God must be sacrificial. It means we are all in. This is not for just a special group of Christians. Where is the idea that ministers and missionaries are to give one hundred percent of their lives and the rest of the Church is expected to give less? The truth is that all believers, everyone who follows Jesus Christ, every disciple of Christ, is to give one hundred percent. We are all expected to be totally committed to Jesus Christ. In fact, there is no such thing as less than total commitment. If we say we are half committed, we are really saying we are not committed at all. If you are worshipping apart from a commitment to God, it is false worship. It is no worship at all. If you say, "Everything is yours, Lord, except this and this", then it is no commitment and no sacrifice. We are all to be living sacrifices to God.

The basis of this commitment is the mercies of God. Because God has been so merciful to us, and has purchased us by the blood of Jesus Christ, we can give ourselves completely to Him. This kind of commitment is to be all in for Jesus Christ. The demands of this commitment involve not being conformed to this world, but being transformed by renewing of our minds. That is how we worship Him. The effect of this commitment is knowing the will of God. Are you a "living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God"? How do you know? Are you conformed to the world? Do you act like the rest of the world? Are there things in your life that you need to give up in order to be a living sacrifice for God? What fruit of righteousness are you bearing? What fruit of righteousness do you need to bear? Pray to God to show you where change needs to happen and commit yourself fully to Him. Thanks be to God. Amen!