

# Critical Elements of True Worship

I want to draw your attention to Romans chapter 12 and verses 1 and 2; very, very familiar portion of Scripture, Romans chapter 12, verses 1 and 2. The apostle Paul, by inspiration, writes this: “I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable” – or well-pleasing – “and perfect.”

The phrase that I want to draw to your attention is at the end of verse 1: “your spiritual service of worship.” Worship is a popular subject these days, talked about a lot. There is a great amount of activity and commotion in the church these days, centered around the idea of worship. I’m afraid that most people view worship and music as synonymous. And if you said to some congregation, “I want you to worship the Lord with me,” they would assume immediately music would begin.

There are people who believe that music is so inseparable from worship that it’s critical what style of music you use; and if you don’t use the right music, the music which speaks in the vernacular in any given group of people, you somehow limit their worship. The battle rages so fiercely over styles of music in the church as the means of worship that churches actually fragment into groups of people on all sides of the issue, and very often churches actually split over music, because the basic underlying idea that some people have in their mind is that music produces worship, or music induces worship; and if you don’t have the right style of music, worship won’t happen. If the tune isn’t contemporary, if the tune isn’t familiar, if the arrangement isn’t what it should be to interest a given group of people, they won’t be able to worship. In the pop church, music often dominates, long and loud and repetitious; and it is an effort to move people’s feelings and emotions in the direction of worship. There are many people who assume that music is the origin or the source of worship; and the illusion is that certain styles of music produce worship, certain tunes and certain arrangements induce worship, and other ones somehow limit it.

Now this may sound strange to you because I love music, I love music. But music, as such, has nothing to do with worship. Music can’t produce worship. It can’t induce worship. Music is not the origin of worship. Let me say it another way: music is not the beginning of worship, it is the end of it. I love music, but I do not need music to worship. And there is some music that’s not helpful to me in my worship.

I enjoy music; I enjoy the sound of it, I enjoy the beauty of it; and it surely enriches my worship. I like certain melodies because they are beautiful or elaborate. I like certain tunes and certain arrangements, but those tunes and arrangements play a rather incidental role in my worship. Music or no music, music that is uniquely lilting and beautiful and winsome, or music that is not so much that way, whatever the music, I worship from a very different origin. My worship comes from another place. Where does it originate? That’s what this text is telling us. Music is the end of worship.

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I love the songs we sang tonight and this morning. I love them because they are filled with my worship. They don't produce it, they don't induce it. They're not the source of it, they're not the origin of it, but they are the expression of it.

I want us to look at that phrase, "your spiritual service of worship," and just meditate on it a little bit. Spiritual service of worship is a notable phrase; and to begin with, we focus on the word "spiritual," *logikos*. It simply means "in the realm of the soul." When we talk about worship, we're talking about something that originates in the soul, in the inner person. The word actually could be translated "reasonable," as it is in some translations; that is, it originates in the reason, in the intelligence. Worship is *latreia*, it is a religious worship, it is a word used for priestly activities.

Our worship before God, the service that we render to God in worship, is spiritual. That is to say, it is internal rather than external. Music or no music, beautiful music or not so beautiful music, true worship originates in the soul, it is spiritual, and that is where it begins. This is the worship, Paul says, that is acceptable to God. It is the kind of worship God desires. Greek term here means "utterly satisfying to God."

Now keep in mind, worship is an act by which we offer praise to God, right? It is not a mood that we put ourselves in. It is not a feeling that we have induced by the beauty of what we hear. Worship is an activity which we give to God. He is the audience. He is the one to whom we offer worship. Therefore we need to offer Him that worship which is acceptable to Him.

And what is acceptable worship to God? It is that worship that is spiritual, not physical; not just the voice, but the soul. It is that worship that rises out of the heart. This is the worship that is satisfying to God. And, of course, in Romans 12:1 and 2 it says nothing about music.

Music playing and singing is our physical response to the worship of the soul. But a worshiping soul is a worshiping soul; and if there's music, it sings; and if there's no music, it worships without the tune by thanking God for His person and His works, and offering Him praise. True worship then comes from the soul; and the more your soul grasps the glory and wonder of God, the more you will worship.

I agree that there's nothing more exhilarating and joyful and, even in a sense, instructive than this kind of corporate worship. But it is only true worship to the degree that it is infused with your heart adoration of God. And the more you know of God, the more you infuse into your worship. That's why I feel so badly about the death of the hymns. You could go to a lot of churches and never hear the music you heard this morning; you could go to most churches and never hear that. That's tragic, because the hymns carry theology in a profound way. They also carry it in a subtle way. And there are a lot of people who can't sing the hymns because they don't get it, because they don't know enough theology to pick up the subtleties and the nuances.

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I love to sing the hymns because they're not just flatly apparent, they draw up the deeper things; that's why they've lasted for centuries. And you bring to your worship only what your heart brings to your worship. And if the primary experience for you is the groove of the tune, that's not worship. And if you're content with the seven-eleven choruses – seven words repeated eleven times – that doesn't say a whole lot for the depth of your theology; you're not infusing that experience of song with much soul knowledge.

So having said that, let's look at our text a little bit and ask a few simple questions. What should motivate our worship? What should motivate our worship? Not the introduction to the tune, not the beginning of the band or the orchestra or the organ or the choir. What should motivate our worship? Verse 1: "I urge you therefore, brethren," – here it comes – "by the mercies of God." We should be motivated by the mercies of God to offer to God spiritual service of worship.

What do we mean by that? "What are the mercies of God?" plural. Well, essentially, it is everything that God has given us in mercy. That means everything God has given us that we don't deserve; and that would include everything, because we don't deserve anything.

Everything that we have from God is a mercy. And, in fact, that's Paul's way to sum up chapters 1 through 11. That's right. The mercies of God are those great spiritual realities of which Paul has been writing through the opening eleven chapters of this great epistle. And if you were to go back into Romans, here you would find this kind of list.

Here are things of which Paul has written that can be included in the category the mercies of God: eternal love, eternal grace, the Holy Spirit, everlasting peace, eternal joy, saving faith, comfort, strength, wisdom, hope, patience, kindness, honor, glory, righteousness, security, eternal life, forgiveness, reconciliation, justification, sanctification, freedom, resurrection, sonship, and on going intercession, and more. That's the sum of what Paul has been telling us is ours in salvation through chapters 1 to 11.

What is your response to the mercies of God? I think the psalmist said it well, Psalm 116:12, "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward us?" "When I count up the benefits, the mercies of God that are given to me, what shall I render to the Lord?" That's the question the psalmist asks.

And here Paul gives us an answer: "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God," – because of the mercies of God – "to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship." As a result of this mighty work of Christ at the cross, as a result of the salvation that has come to us through the cross and the resurrection, we should be moved, motivated, compelled, driven by the staggering mercies of God given to us to worship Him.

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Then what generates, what produces true worship is a grasp of salvation's richness, a grasp of the glories of saving grace. That is why when Paul comes to the end of listing the mercies of God, he's about to burst. And so in verse 33 of chapter 11 of Romans, he bursts forth with these words: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again?" It is all inscrutable, it is all undeserved. "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen."

That is pure worship. There's no tune, there's no music; nobody started plucking some kind of stringed instrument. It was an explosion of praise in contemplation of eleven chapters of inspired truth about the riches of God given to an undeserving sinner. Paul goes on in chapters 12, 13, 14, 15 and in the last chapter, chapter 16; but he can't contain himself at the end of chapter 16, and again it comes out, verse 25: "Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but is now manifest, and by the Scripture of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations leading to obedience of faith; to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen."

It's all to Him. He starts in verse 25, "To Him who establishes us according to the gospel through the preaching of the cross, to Him who has given us the revelation of the mystery," – meaning the New Testament, the Scriptures – "to Him who has brought all nations to salvation, leading to the obedience of faith; to Him be all the glory through Jesus Christ."

The apostle Paul has these doxological outbursts all through his writing in some of the most amazing places. They appear again and again. One that I love is at the end of chapter 3 in Ephesians: "Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think," – He has given us mercies that are unimaginable – "to Him who is able to do this according to the power that works in us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen." Bottom line: the more Scripture you know, the more doctrine you know, the more worship you give. It is motivated by, spawned by, originated by knowledge, knowledge, knowledge. Philippians – it's a simple doxology. Paul has been talking in Philippians about the things that God gives us. Verse 19, Philippians 4: "My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." Just pull that statement apart. God will give you in Christ everything you need according to His infinite riches. Having said that, he can't contain worship, and he bursts out with, "Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen." These kinds of things always comes in response to a contemplation of the glories of salvation.

In writing to Timothy, Paul rehearses his own testimony. At the end of 1 Timothy 1, he says, "I was formerly" – verse 13 – "a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent

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aggressor.” And then this, “And yet I was shown mercy. I was shown mercy.” And then he comes to the doxology, “Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.” That’s worship. It comes from a heart overwhelmed with the mercies of God associated with the cross.

That’s the motivation to worship. Music or no music; this style, that style, any style; my heart is so overflowing with the truths of the mercies of God that whether I’m in Grace Church or in Russia, or whether I’m in the mountains of South America somewhere, or wherever I might be on this planet, whatever it is that I’m hearing, even a simple chorus, I can infuse by my understanding of these things with richness that not everybody understands, and it becomes for me a worshipping expression. I bring my worship to the music, and so do you.

Paul’s language moves in our thinking from the motivation to worship to the mandate, because he basically is telling us we need to do this. He begins – what? – with these words: “I beg you, I plead with you, I urge you,” – *parakaleō*, compound, “I call you,” a strong call, even a command – “brethren, because of these mercies of God, grasp these mercies, know these mercies.”

You might encourage a young Christ who’s just come to the Lord to start in Romans 1 and just be saturated with those eleven chapters, so that you grasp the greatness of these mercies. You don’t help people by keeping them in superficial understanding of everything, by making everything as simple as you can by a reductionist approach to the Bible. I cringe at some preaching that I hear. It is so minimal. You want them to understand as much as possible; you want to understand as much as possible. Paul pleads with us on this regard to grasp the mercies of God in their fullness. That’s the mandate.

And, thirdly, there’s a manner for us to worship. He says, here it is, “Present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice.” That is to say, offer your whole life in worship. It’s a way of life. When he says “body” here, he means all our human faculties, all our human faculties, all our humanness. “I beat my body to bring it into subjection,” he says to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 9.

He means by that all that is human about him. Present it, *paristēmi*, it’s a temple term, it’s a Levitical term: “Put it on the altar.” Die to your own agenda, to everything around you, and give yourself all your humanness, all that you are in a living and holy sacrifice to God. That’s the manner.

Motivation comes from the heart. The mandate is to do this because it is right. The manner is to let that heart understanding, that heart grasp of the truth, that heart love of the mercies of God, that heart gratitude affect all that you are, so that your whole life becomes an offering and worship is a 24/7 experience. You hold nothing back. A couple of Sunday nights ago we talked about slaves of Christ. And I thank you all for your response, it was a wonderful response, very encouraging. This is more of that

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slave talk. In fact, this is even more severe than offering yourself as a slave. This is putting your life on the altar, giving it up in every sense – very similar to that slave talk. The language here is Old Testament language. An Old Testament offeror would bring his sacrifice to God outside the Holy Place and he would hand it to the priest; the priest would take it in and offer it to God on the altar. When someone brought the offering, it symbolized a worshiping heart, because that's what God really wanted. Even in the Old Testament, God was not pleased with only external offerings, He wanted the heart. He's always wanted the heart. God wants true worshipers who worship Him in spirit and in truth.

But now there are no more dead offerings, only living ones. The sacrificial system has been set aside and God wants living sacrifices. He wants us to follow the Lord Jesus Christ and deny ourselves. And in so doing, end of verse 2, we will indicate, prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. In other words, when you put your life on the line, you are saying, "Not my will, but Yours be done. From now on, whatever is Your will, whatever according to You is good and acceptable and perfect, that I desire to do." This is the living sacrifice.

But how do you get there? There's a fourth thing to consider, a fourth critical element: the mind of true worship. How do you get to the point where you understand the mercies of God? How do you get to the point where you are so overwhelmed and grateful for those mercies, that you are willing from the heart as a spiritual act of worship to give up your entire self in a single expression of worship which abandons your own life to the divine purposes of God? How do you get to that point?

Verse 2 explains. Negative first: "Do not be conformed to this world." Very interesting Greek verb, *suschēmatisō*, from which we get "schematic." The word is a compound word, so it's a very intensified word. It literally means "to be stamped like metal," or "to be molded." We could translate it, "Stop allowing yourselves to be molded by the world." You cannot allow your mind to be molded by the world.

What is the world? The world is simply fallen thinking, fallen ideas, ideas that belong to the kingdom of darkness. It is the floating mass of ungodly ideas and behaviors that are separated from and hostile to the will of God. You will never worship the way you should worship if you are being conformed, molded to, stamped with the image of the world.

John said, "If anybody loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." If your whole affection and love is toward the world, you're not a believer. But as believers, we can allow ourselves to be influenced by the world, even though we love Christ. Do not let the world mold you into its kind of thought and behavior. Don't think like the world, and don't act like the world.

On the other hand, here's the positive: be transformed, *metamorphōō*, "metamorphous," "transformation." Present imperative, passive. Allow yourself to be constantly being transformed. And who's doing that? The Spirit of God. Second

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Corinthians 3:18 is transforming the faithful believer into the very image of Christ from one level of glory to the next, to the next, to the next.

You want to worship? You want to worship through a myriad of expressions of music? Do not look to music to induce your worship, look to music as simply an expression of that which is induced by a heart that is rapt by the mercies of God, obedient to the command to worship to the degree that one has given himself or herself up in total abandonment to God and to Christ to do that which is good and acceptable and perfect to Him. How do you do that? By having a transformed mind. He says it, verse 2, “By the renewing of your mind.”

This is another Greek word that is worth – just for those of you who are interested in that: anakainōsis. It means “a complete renovation of thought.” You’ve got to have your thinking completely altered. It’s all about the mind. It’s not about the emotion, it’s all about the mind.

How wonderful that here, according to 1 Corinthians 2:16, we have the mind of Christ. Isn’t that great? We have the mind of Christ. I know how God thinks insofar as God has disclosed that. I know how Christ thinks, I know how the Holy Spirit thinks, because they have disclosed it here. This is the mind of the Trinity. How wonderful is that? So, if I want my mind totally renovated, if I want to think the way God wants me to think, I have the source right here. It is the mind of God revealed in Scripture.

In writing to the Colossians, Paul said this in chapter 1, verse 9: “For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,” – if you want to have spiritual worship, you need spiritual wisdom, spiritual understanding; you need the knowledge of His will – “so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, pleasing Him in all respects.”

So what is the source of true worship? It is the truth, the knowledge of the word of God, which is to say the knowledge of the mercies of God. And we’re back where we began: to know the truth, to believe the truth, to hold convictions about the truth, and to love the truth. It kind of works like that. It is conviction, followed by affection, saying with David, “O how I love Your law.”

Now when we come to the Lord’s Table tonight, we come to the focal point of the mercies of God. Let’s bow together in prayer.

Lord, as we now come to remember the sacrifice of Christ, the point at which all the mercies of God find their ground, their origin, we want to thank You for everything that the cross has brought to us; and the cross has brought everything to us. We thank You that while we were enemies, Christ died for us. We thank You that when we were rebellious and unworthy and wretched sinners, worthy only of eternal punishment, we were redeemed. We were there when the Savior died on the cross; He was bearing our sin in His own body on the cross.

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He who knew no sin became sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. This is wondrous, and it wasn't certainly a minimalist salvation; for the work on the cross has brought to us limitless, infinite mercies. We want to know them, understand them, grasp them, believe them, and love them, so that worship is a spiritual service that passes from our spirit through all our human faculties, and is offered to You as an expression of thanks. We give You the praise, we give You the glory for all You've done. And again we offer ourselves on that altar as living sacrifices, holding back nothing; we yield everything to You. We die to ourselves again. As Paul said, "We must die daily, that we might live to Your glory." May our worship be more than it's ever been, because we know more than we've ever known, as we contemplate the greatness of the cross.