

**Sermon Title: A Living Sacrifice**  
**Biblical Text: Romans 12:1**  
**Teaching Series: Justified by Love**  
**Preaching Date: October 16, 2022**  
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## **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.*

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We've covered a lot of ground in our Romans series. We started this journey remotely, in April of 2020. Since then we've traversed eleven chapters, nearly 100 weeks considering some of the most dense and foundational teachings of the Christian faith. And today, Paul, the author, is going to make his most significant transition in the entire letter. He's going to move us from clear theological explanation to practical teaching; from what we ought to believe to how we ought to act. *In light of all this truth, that Jews and Gentiles are saved by the same Jesus, by the same grace through faith, here's how you should live.* That's what I'd like to explore the remainder of this teaching series, which will take us through November of next year.

*How do we live in light of the gospel?*

Today, Paul makes this transition by saying, **"I appeal to you therefore."** That 'therefore' is the connective literary tissue which holds together the first eleven chapters with the last five. *Because of everything I've said up until this point ... I*

want you to worship this way, like this. And that's his focus, worship. Specifically what he calls **"your spiritual worship"** .... or really what that word means is your logical worship or your true worship. In other words, there's only one kind of worship that makes sense.

Three years before his untimely death in 2008, renown writer David Foster Wallace instructed the graduating class of Kenyon College on worship. To the best of my knowledge he was not a Christian. But he explained, *"in the day-to day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship."* Wallace understood that worship is not a strictly religious affair. It's not simply the adherents of organized faith who believe and hope and venerate something. We all worship.

In fact, there may be no greater blind spot in our modern world than this truth: we all worship something. We all build our lives on something. We all hope in something. We all serve something. That's worship. Worship is the incarnation of our faith. Worship is our lived theology. This is simply how we are made.

Now in our prevailing and relativistic western culture, even if we concede this fact (that everyone worships), we generally reject the idea that what we worship ought to be critiqued or questioned. We think we get to choose what is right or logical or true to us. And yet, what Paul is going to teach us, in light of Romans 1-11, is that there is a logical worship. There's a singular good and true way to build your life, and this is his focus in Romans 12:1. Here's what he says, ***Read 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.*

Paul tells us three things about true worship ...

- The *reason* for true worship.
- The *cost* of true worship.
- The *reward* of true worship.

[Pray]

## **Movement 1: The Reason for True Worship (v.1a,**

## **Exodus 20:3, Deuteronomy 6:13-14, Luke 4:8, 2**

## **Samuel 22:4)**

*Why do you worship God? Why should we worship the God of the Bible? What reason do we have for building our lives on him over and above the gods, idols, ideas, and powers of our day and culture and experiences? Or other world religions? What comes to mind? What's the reason?*

Let's start with the big picture and then zoom in on what Paul is saying ...

A good starting point is simply acknowledging that God explicitly tell us to worship him, exclusively. The first commandment is clear, *Read Exodus 20:3 ...*

***"You shall have no other gods before me."*** Moses builds on this teaching, instructing Israel, *Read Deuteronomy 6:13-14 ... "It is the Lord your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear. You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you..."* Jesus then actually quotes this exact passage when Satan tempts him in the wilderness. Satan

promises Jesus the kingdoms of the world if he bows down and worships him.

Jesus responds, *Read Luke 4:8 ... "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'"* At some level we should worship God because he tells us to worship him, exclusively.

We should worship God because God tells us to worship him. But there's more ...

When King David, one of the main architects of the Psalms, was saved by God from the violent acts of Saul, he worshipped God. But David's worship is not a response to a command to worship. The reason for David's worship is God's worthiness. *Read 2 Samuel 22:4 ... "I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies."* Church, nothing else is worthy of your worship. Nothing else is worthy of being the foundational impulse or aim of your life. Foster Wallace continued at the commencement, *"And the compelling reason for maybe choosing some sort of god or spiritual-type thing to worship ... is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things, if they are where you tap real meaning in life, then you will never have enough, never feel you have enough. It's the truth. Worship your own body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly, and when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally plant you."* What's he saying? Money, stuff, beauty, sex ... these are not worthy of your worship. In fact, they ultimately destroy you.

We should worship God because God is worthy. But there's more ...

Though God commands worship and God is worthy of worship, neither are the basis for Paul's instruction on worship. *What's he say? Read Romans 12:1a ... "I*

***appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God...*** That's the *reason* for true worship. Paul transitions from the first eleven chapters, looks back on all that he has taught and says ... *that's all about the mercies of God.* That's the *reason* for true worship: God's mercy. Or to put in a complimentary way, the only response that makes sense to God's mercy is true worship. Theologian Louis Berkhof explains that, ***"If the grace of God contemplate [a person] guilty before God, and therefore in need of forgiveness, the mercy of God contemplates him as one who is bearing the consequences of sin, who is in pitiable condition, and who therefore needs divine help"*** (Systematic Theology, 72).

Grace leads to forgiveness of sins.

Mercy leads to help in need.

Yes, God commands our worship. Yes, God is worthy of worship. But the reason Paul says we ought to truly worship God is because he helps us in ways no one else can. In fact, if you notice, he says ***"the mercies of God."*** It's plural. According to Marva Dawn that plural form tells us that, ***"the abstract concept is manifested in all sorts of tangible forms"*** (*Truly the Community*, 8). God is not just generally merciful. God was not just merciful to you when you became a Christian. God's mercies show up everyday in plain and subtle expressions of love and help and care and phone calls and hugs and reminders and meals and texts. We are to worship God because of all his mercies to us. We build our lives on God because he does not destroy us, he helps us.

The *reason* for true worship is mercy. But it comes at a costs.

## **Movement 2: The Cost of True Worship (v.1b, Psalm 51:17, Romans 6:11, Luke 9:23-26)**

When our worship is not motivated by the mercies of God, it's almost always motivated by fear. Think about it. If we know God to be the God of mercy, then we don't have to fear punishment. Yet this is the exact thinking that draws us to things like money, beauty, and power. These promise quick and immediate protection. While God's mercies woo us to love and trust him in return, no matter the cost ... fear teaches us to worship God so that we don't get hurt. We don't want to suffer. Perhaps this is why you are here. Perhaps this is why you obey, or teach others to obey ... fear of suffering. We see this in the story of the Rich Young Man (see Mark 10:17-22). He asked Jesus, what must I do to inherit eternal life? And when Jesus told him to sell all his position and bless the poor ... it was too great a cost. Why? Because he trusted those things to protect him, not God. Religion was simply another means of spiritual insurance.

You see, when we worship because of mercies, we surrender. But when our worship is motivated by fear, we protect.

Fear is a primary motivation for worship in many streams of the Church as well as the popular culture. No one is immune. Christians notoriously use shame and consequence as ways to coerce believers to obey and honor God. We see this primarily with children, and especially in relationship with sexuality. Politicians employ a state of emergency in order to illicit trust and allegiance from their constituencies. Brands do it too, *buy this or else ... Do you see?* It's all about worshipping out of fear. It's all about mitigating the damage or cost or suffering of true worship. But fear does not work. Fear never produces true worshippers, ever.

Pastor Tim Keller explains, *"If fear is the primary motivation for our obedience, we should see the following effects ... Our motivation will lose its power over time ... [we'll have] trouble with repentance ... [we'll find] it difficult to endure suffering or troubles"* (Romans 8-16 For You, 102). Fear does not produce true worship.

True worship is costly. It's not the avoidance of suffering, but it's a power which enables us to suffer well. And therefore true worship must be a response to mercy and love, not fear and control. Having established the *reason* of mercy, that's why Paul goes on to explain the *cost* of true worship. *Read Romans 12:1b ... "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice ..."* The reason is mercy. The cost is your body or your whole life. The term 'body' is representative in this case, however it does not exclude our physical bodies. In fact, it likely represents two things. \

- First, Paul is talking about our personal, physical, and whole being. Our whole life.
- Second, he's talking about the collective Body of Christ. All of us.

Worship will cost you your whole self and your whole community.

*What's this look like?*

Well, Paul says we are to offer our whole self and whole community as what he calls, *"a living sacrifice."* This is deeply counterintuitive. At the risk of being overly simplistic ... when something is sacrificed it's killed ... it is no longer living, *right?* Paul's thought plays off his first-century audience's literal understanding of sacrifices as well as a rich spiritual heritage of understanding this as a metaphor.

They were familiar with the religious practice of killing something as a sign of obedience, devotion, and worship. But they also know that a sacrifice was spiritual, not always literal. The psalmist understood, *Read Psalm 51:17 ... "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."* Worship is about a humble spirit. Worship is about confessing sin and repenting. Worship then is a whole life offering, individually and communally. That means you can not embody this text without your brothers and sisters. Like many passages and commands of Scripture, you can't obey this on your own.

The body becomes this spiritual offering, when the very members of our body are surrendered in obedience to God. In the late fourth century the Archbishop of Constantinople (modern-day Turkey), St. John Chrysostom explained, *"Let the eye look upon no evil thing, and it hath become a sacrifice; let thy tongue speak nothing filthy, and it hath become an offering; let thine hand do no lawless deed, and it hath become a whole burnt offering"* (*Homilies on The Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans*, 496). We are living, but we are very much dying to ourselves ... to our desires ... and every other god we might possibly worship. That was Paul's message back in Romans 6, *Read Romans 6:11 ... "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."* That's true worship. It's the daily refusal to protect our desires and impulses toward sin and idolatry. We live as sacrifices, though it costs us our very lives. Not simply on our own, but as a community, as the Body of Christ we learn to do this together. We find courage and help from one another to become this city within a city as it were, living by a different mandate ... worshipping a different God than the prevail culture of our day. True worship will cost us greatly.



You see ... this is why we don't want to offer our bodies as living sacrifice. We don't want to lose our lives. We know instinctively that true worship is this costly. And so we settle for false worship and idol worship. We build our lives on other things. All of us. Sin is worshipping or offering ourselves to anyone or anything other than the God of the Bible.

And, again, I think we do this out of fear ...

- We fear worshipping God will make us poor ... so we build our lives on money.
- We fear worshipping God will make us look bad ... so we build our lives on beauty.
- We fear worshipping God will make us miss out on pleasure ... so we build our lives on sex and romance and adventure.
- We fear worshipping God will make us vulnerable and weak ... so we build our lives on earthly powers and titles and important jobs.

But these do not command your worship. These are not worthy of your worship. These do not show you mercy ... they destroy you. On their own merit ... money is never enough. It only steals your peace. Beauty never lasts. It only deceives your affections. Sex never satisfies. It manipulates your intimacy. Power never protects. It only exposes your insecurities. It's only the true worship of God which does not steal or deceive or manipulate or expose you. No. My brothers and sisters ... true worship of God saves you.

The *reason* for true worship is mercy. The *cost* of true worship is our life. Oh, but there is a great *reward*.

## **Movement 3: The Reward of True Worship (v.1c, Luke 9:23-26, Galatians 5:25-27, Mark 1:11, 2 Corinthians 2:14-16)**

Paul continues to describe the nature of true worship. He calls it, *Read Romans 12:1c ... "holy and acceptable to God ..."* Many commentators see living, holy, and pleasing all as adjectives of the word "sacrifice." In other words, the sacrifice of your life in worship is living and holy and pleasing to God. While living seems to describe the nature of the sacrifice, holy and pleasing seem to describe the quality of the sacrifice.

True worship is holy to God.

True worship is acceptable to God.

It's good to worship God.

It's devastating to worship other things.

I think we understand this reality. We all know it's not good to center our lives on fleeting and earthly pleasures. David Foster Wallace concludes his thought to Keyon College, *"On one level, we all know this stuff already - it's been codified as myths, proverbs, clichés, bromides, epigrams, parables: the skeleton of every great story. The trick is keeping the truth up front in daily consciousness."* As Christians in particular, we know worshipping lesser things never goes well. Perhaps that's Ancient Israel's story in a nutshell. Worshipping other gods, never goes well. But the trick is remembering. The trick is actually living this way, *right?*

Jesus said, *Read Luke 9:23-26 ... "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?"*

Following Jesus is about counting the costs of becoming a living sacrifice. But we don't do so out of fear. Fear of his disapproval. Or fear of his judgment. No. We follow Jesus because of the mercy of God. In particular because Jesus counted the costs and became a sacrifice for us. Before he told us to offer our bodies, Jesus offered his body as a living sacrifice. And he did so out of love, not fear. This is the most tangible form of God's mercies toward us and it ought to lead us to tangible forms of sacrificial living, in worship to him.

True worship then, is the reward. We often want points or blessings because we worship or obey God. *Right?* But being holy and acceptable to God is not what we aim for in the Christian life, it's what we are because of Jesus Christ. *You see?* If daily we're working to become holy and pleasing to God, we're worshipping out of fear. But if daily we're receiving the gift of relationship with the Father, if we are surrendering to who we are in Christ, we're worshipping out of mercy.

True worship is the reward. And because of Christ, it's holy and acceptable to God. To put it another way, when the Father looks at us, he sees his Son. That's Galatians 5, *Read Galatians 5:25-27 ... in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.* When the Father looks at us, he sees his Son. And in Mark 1:11 God says of his Son, *Read Mark 1:11 ... "With you I am well pleased."* He sees his Son, and he's pleased. He sees you, and he's pleased. We can joyfully offer our whole lives

and whole community as a living sacrifice to the Lord which is holy and acceptable to him, because Jesus already has.

That's why it's a reward. In sin you and I are not holy and acceptable to God.

Through redemption, the sacrifice of our lives now an aroma to God. *Read 2*

*Corinthians 2:14-16 ... But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?*

We are a living sacrifice, and it has a particular scent. We give off the aroma of the one who was sacrificed for us.

God is merciful to you, worship him.

Worship the Lord by giving your life away, with your community.

When this happens we'll know the joy of true worship, a reward unto itself.