

A LIVING SACRIFICE — YOUR REASONABLE WORSHIP ROMANS 12:1-2	96
THE WORSHIPFUL LIFE — LIVED IN COMMUNITY, USING ONE’S GIFTS – ROMANS 12:3-8	97
WORSHIP AS A LIFE OF AUTHENTIC LOVE ROMANS 12:9-21	98
PERSONAL APPLICATION – ROMANS 13:1-14	100

As Paul begins the final portion of his great letter to the Romans, he supplies a widened understanding of worship with a new definition for a word at the heart of worship — “sacrifice.”



A LIFE OF WORSHIP

WORSHIP — MORE THAN A CHURCH SERVICE

When you think of “worship,” what comes to mind? For most of us who have been Christians a long time, we immediately picture a church building, with a crowd gathering on a Sunday morning. If asked “What’s happening here?” we might reply, “A worship service.” We could paint a picture with vivid details: a pastor wearing vestments or a leader in a suit, an altar, chairs or pews, hymnals and/or a screen with projected hymns, an organist or a “praise team,” ushers with bulletins, and a crying baby or two! We know there will be a liturgy of sorts, Bible readings, a sermon, prayers, and perhaps Holy Communion. If it goes much beyond an hour, we will start to fidget. That’s worship, isn’t it?

Well, yes, that’s the shape of our public worship when we gather around the Word and the sacraments. That gathering has ancient and honorable roots in the Old Testament temple ritual, the Sabbath gatherings of the Jews in the synagogue, and the agape meals of the earliest Christians. It’s our “hour of power,” the time for prayer and praise and spiritual nourishment with fellow believers that nothing else can match. But what happens during the other 167 hours of the week? Is the worship hour “sacred” and all else “secular”?

Paul didn't think so. As Paul begins the final portion of his great letter to the Romans, he supplies a widened understanding of worship with a new definition for a word at the heart of worship — "sacrifice." As we will see, he's aiming at nothing less than an entire life that could be called "worship." That makes sense, because the word "worship" comes from a longer English word, "worthship." What's God "worth" to us? How will we express His value for understanding ourselves and what we're doing day by day? Even the liturgy reminds us "that we should *at all times and in all places* give thanks unto Thee, O Lord"! Let's have a look at how the apostle spells out the implications of a "life of worship" in all those "times and places" of our everyday life.

A LIVING SACRIFICE — YOUR REASONABLE WORSHIP

ROMANS 12:1-2

In the epistles, the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus is invariably followed by the exhortation to live a life that fits the faith. We go from "the life God gives" to "the life the believer lives." From the indicative to the imperative! Romans 12 begins, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God" (v. 1). It's important to see that the "go power" of our Christian life is NOT our own willful resolve, but "the mercies of God." That fuels us. We love, said the apostle John, "because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

There follow eleven imperative verbs in this chapter. The first of those imperatives is "present your bodies as a living sacrifice" (v. 1). The Old Testament is filled with directions for sacrifice as part of worship. Bulls, rams, lambs, and doves are all killed as part of the sacrificial ritual. What Paul urges seems an oxymoron: a "living" sacrifice?! Not of one's animals, but of oneself. The reason is that Jesus Christ was the once-for-all sacrifice for sin (1 Peter 3:18). No more lambs or bulls. None is needed. Sin's price has been paid. But there is still something we may give in response: ourselves!

Here in verse 1, the offering is nothing less than "your bodies." In a certain church one Sunday morning, the pastor urged the congregation to "give of yourselves" when the offering plate was passed. A young boy sitting by the aisle hesitated for a moment when he received the plate. Then he placed it on the floor and stood in it! That boy's right, argues Paul. Our bodies, our lives, are to be offered to God. Paul is not alone in urging a sacrificial giving of one's life in response to God's mercy. Peter calls us a "holy priesthood" to "offer spiritual sacrifices" (1 Peter 2:5). And what are those? They begin, says Paul, with "the sacrificial offering of your faith" (Phil. 2:17). Along with that, says the writer to the Hebrews, comes "a sacrifice of praise" (Heb. 13:15). But there's more.

What we do with our bodies day by day is in fact our worship. In Rom. 1:24, Paul said that human sin was displayed in the "dishonoring of their bodies." Now the new life is displayed in presenting those same bodies as a living sacrifice. This is, in truth, "your spiritual worship." The word "spiritual" translates the Greek word *logikeen*. A better translation might be "logical" or "reasonable." It makes sense. Since our bodies are to be redeemed (Rom. 8:23), presenting those bodies as a living sacrifice is a full-time thing, not just one hour a week! Martin Franzmann wrote, "Since all men have bodies, all can sacrifice, all can become priests. Since men are never without their bodies, worship is constant." It just makes sense!

It won't happen automatically. It won't come without our willing participation. There must be a change in us. Paul says, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (v. 2). "Transformed" renders the Greek word *metamorphousthe*. The butterfly, which has a metamorphosis from being a caterpillar, is a fascinating symbol for one who lives a resurrected, transformed life! That renewal of mind, Paul suggests, is part of that

“newness of life” that began in our baptism (6:4). The new mind, he says here, tries to “discern what is the will of God.” It behooves someone who is serious about the Christian life to ask, “What does God want me to do with my possessions, my time, my preferred entertainments and topics of conversation?” Do we simply get in step with what worldly people do, laugh at the same jokes, indulge ourselves the same way? Are we conformed or transformed?

THE WORSHIPFUL LIFE — LIVED IN COMMUNITY, USING ONE’S GIFTS

ROMANS 12:3-8

That transforming of the mind and life takes place in a community of faith. Left alone we may, Paul warns, think of ourselves “more highly than [we] ought to think” (v. 3). A “sober judgment,” the opportunity to see ourselves as we really are, is shaped by a faith that listens to God, not to the hairdresser, the golfing buddy, or the busybody next door! Sober judgment forms when one is a “member” of a “body” where Christ is the head (v. 5) and we speak to one another (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19). Are we listening?

In that community of faith we encourage one another to use the gifts God gives us. Verses 6–8 is one of several “gift lists” in the New Testament (see also 1 Cor. 12:8–10 and 12:28–30; Eph. 4:11). The lists are more illustrative than exhaustive, for they all differ. The list here includes seven gifts. It omits the “spectacular” gifts in 1 Cor. 12 (miracles, healings, tongue-speaking, interpretation) and focuses on the “bread-and-butter” gifts that are a staple item in most congregations: prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, contribution, leading, and acts of mercy.

It is clear that Paul is doing more than a simple “listing.” He is encouraging us to USE our gifts, not leave them on the shelf! “Prophecy” (v. 6), as is well-known, is not primarily that prediction of future events but the explanation of things that are unclear or the application of God’s Word to people

in a specific context. R.C.H. Lenski speaks of this as offering “edification, admonition, and consolation,” something “all true Christians” may be able to do for one another. “Teaching” (v. 7) is sound instruction that accords with the teaching of Jesus, the true Teacher of the church. Between these “word” gifts comes “service.” That word renders the Greek *diakonia* (from which we get “deacon” and “deaconess”), the caring work believers do, especially for the poor and needy, as enjoined by Jesus Himself (Matt. 23:11) and organized by the seven “deacons” in Acts 6.

The final four gifts do not appear on any other list. “Encouragement” is the word we might use for the ESV’s “the one who exhorts” (v. 8). The word literally refers to one who is “called to the side” of another, and is the basis for one of the names we give to the Holy Spirit (“Paraclete”). Next comes “one who contributes,” something we are invited to do each time an offering plate passes or a “Stewardship Sunday” arrives. One may do such things with a miserly reluctance or with an eye on impressing someone, so Paul adds that it be done “in generosity,” which may also mean “simplicity.” Every congregation needs the next gift mentioned, “one who leads”! We need people to lead congregational gatherings, Vacation Bible Schools, youth mission trips, and neighborhood canvasses. Who will do it “with zeal” and not with a reluctant “I guess I’ll have to if no one else will” spirit? The final gift is “one who does acts of mercy.” This is the only place in Paul’s writings where showing mercy is attributed to humans rather than to God! We are summoned to do this “with cheerfulness” and not “as if somebody was twisting his arm to do it” (Ambrosiaster).

Are you getting an idea of what Paul has in mind by “present your bodies” (v. 1)? The willing and eager speaking of God’s Word to one another and the cheerful serving and sharing and caring is the heart of the life that is always “worship.”

While “love” for most people is an emotion, Paul illustrates authentic love with a string of actions.



WORSHIP AS A LIFE OF AUTHENTIC LOVE

ROMANS 12:9-21

The final part of Chapter 12 does not present challenges for interpretation as earlier chapters have. The challenge in these verses is directed at our behavior.

Mark Twain said, “it ain’t those parts of the Bible I can’t understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand.” Among the verses that follow are many which ought to “bother” us because we understand very well that they call for serious changes in our habits and our treatment of others.

Jesus summarized the whole Law into “love God” and “love your neighbor” (Matt. 22:37–40). So here Paul summarizes the worshipful daily life of the Christian with a call to demonstrate AUTHENTIC love: “Let love be genuine” (v. 9). The word “genuine” literally means “without hypocrisy.” While “love” for most people is an *emotion*, Paul illustrates authentic love with a string of *actions*. This, he says unmistakably, is what love looks like. There follows, says Michael Middendorf, a “volley of short, sharp injunctions with little elaboration”:

Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good (v. 9).

Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor (v. 10).

Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord (v. 11).

Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer (v. 12).

Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality (v. 13).

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them (v. 14).

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep (v. 15).

Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly.

Never be wise in your own sight (v. 16).

Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to what is honorable in the sight of all (v. 17).

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all (v. 18).

Beloved, never avenge yourselves... (v. 19).

Some comments are in order. In calling us to “abhor” evil, Paul uses the same root word (“haters [abhorers] of God”) that described fallen humanity back in 1:30. How dramatically things have changed for those who come to faith in Jesus Christ! Verses 10–13 depict what authentic love looks like in the congregation of believers. The command to be “fervent” is really stronger than that. The verb suggests boiling water or blazing fire! Those who exult that they have a church or know a person who is “on fire for the Lord” are using Paul’s image. It is something to which we might rightly aspire. The call to “show hospitality” was crucial in the infant church where the welcome of itinerant missionaries (including Paul himself!) was critical to the growth of the Christian movement.

Paul devotes considerable space to the notion of vengeance (in v. 14 and again in vv. 17–21) because persecution and social ostracism were almost unavoidable in the early church. Some caricature the Old Testament as a “vengeful” document, citing the *lex talionis* (“an eye for an eye” in Ex. 21:24). But that law was actually meant to *limit* the human inclination to vengeance by making sure the penalty did not exceed the crime. Meanwhile, other passages in the Old Testament (Lev. 19:18 and Prov. 20:22) urge no vengeance at all, as did our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:38–42). But Paul went beyond “no vengeance” since God would take care of that (“vengeance is mine” in Deut. 32:35). His counsel for those who would love authentically was to retaliate — with blessing! “Bless those who persecute you” (v. 14). “If your enemy

is hungry, feed him...by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head” (v. 20, citing Prov. 25:21–22). Such a response was unheard of in the contemporary culture. The mention of heaping “coals [of fire] on [the enemy’s] head” is not a wish for painful punishment but the confident claim that such unexpected kindness will cause that enemy to blush with shame and, perhaps, repent. As evidence, some scholars have described an Egyptian practice of carrying on one’s head a dish with burning coals as a sign of repentance (as described by Siegfried Morenz).

One final note is the simple advice the apostle gives in v. 15: “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” In every community there is exquisite joy and crushing sorrow. We find ourselves often at a loss for what to say in such moments. Instead of talking, urges Paul, empathize! Enter the joy with a smile. Shed tears with the tearful. Just BE THERE, and that will be authentic love in action. Our “spiritual worship.” What we are called to share “at all times and in all places.”

Read the chapter once more, dear brother or sister. Read it slowly, meditatively.

Pause to ponder and digest the words. You may even choose to make yourself a list of “what God is prompting me to do” and commence doing it. Remember that the Gospel is “dynamite” (Rom. 1:16)!

How will you implement this chapter in your life, starting this week?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

ROMANS 13:1-14

Lord God, sometimes I am disheartened by “politics” and government! Help me, as I study Your Word this week, to have a new look at it through Your eyes. Help me again to see Your hand in the powers that be and respond in the right way. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

For review:

1. What new ideas about worship did you encounter in your study of Romans 12?

2. How does the “gift list” in Rom. 12 differ from other New Testament lists?

Romans 13:1-7

3. The command in v. 1 is “submit.” In what particular ways does Paul urge the readers to do this in vv. 3-7?

4. “There is no authority except from God” (v. 1). Anything surprising about this, given what we know about the rule of the Roman emperors?

5. How do Paul’s words compare with contemporary American attitudes about “governing authorities”?

6. Rate your feelings about capital punishment on the following scale:

TOTALLY APPROVE

TOTALLY DISAPPROVE

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Summarize what Paul says about it.

7. In light of this section, what do you think Paul might have said about the Revolutionary War?

8. What might Paul have advised the Germans who tried to assassinate Hitler?

Romans 13:8–14

9. Use verse 9 to evaluate this: LOVE GOD, AND DO AS YOU PLEASE.

10. In some versions of the Lord's Prayer, the words "debts" and "debtors" are used. Are they the same as the debts mentioned here (v. 8 NIV)?

Do you think of love as a debt? Owed BY you? Owed TO you?

Is this a helpful or harmful idea for you?

11. Which commandments does Paul cite in v. 9? Why these?

12. Paul uses "night" and "day" metaphorically in v. 12. What more do you read about these terms in 1 John 2:8 and Eph. 5:7–14?

13. How does a believer "clothe" himself with Jesus Christ (v. 14 NIV)?

How would you convert that into practical advice for a new believer struggling with improper behavior patterns?

14. Review your memory challenge verses and share with others in your group any obstacles or benefits you've experienced.

Memory Verse Challenge for Chapter 13

Rom. 13:14 *Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.*