

True Worship

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[0 : 00] As I said, we're taking a break from Mark and we're going to look at this chapter over the next few Sunday mornings, God willing. It's not something we often do. In fact, I can't remember the last time we ever preached on just a chapter over a significant number of weeks.

But it's a really great... All the chapters are great. But it's a really great chapter. It's a fantastic summary of living out the Christian life, and it's very important.

It's so good you could... I think over the summer you could probably memorise it. It'd be a great chapter to memorise. And then you could say, I've memorised a whole chapter of Scripture, and that's a great thing to do.

And we're praying that God will use this powerfully for us to mould us further as Christians in His image to make us more like Him. And so do pray over the summer months, even if you're away, if you're at Kessok or if in holiday or whatever you are, pray that God will use it for St. Columba's, for our church family, for those who visit, but that we will have a kind of snowball effect of blessing as we go through this chapter together.

And you know, we are going into some levels on charter territory moving forward. There are going to be big changes. We spoke about that on Wednesday evening. And isn't it great to know that we can bed ourselves in the living God and in His truth and He's the unchanging one.

[1 : 26] So all our life's always changing. We're always changing. Things are always happening. But we bed ourselves in the great unchanging nature and character of God. And that will be what will bring blessing to St. Columba's in the days and weeks and months that lie ahead.

So I want to look at four, you could do this in so many different ways and every way, we'll only scratch the surface of this verse even of Scripture.

We're going to highlight four truths that are very significant and very important, critical I think.

They've always been critical, whether they were in 1st century Rome, this new church, this early church, this church that was facing difficulties in persecution and opposition, or whether it's 21st century in Edinburgh where nobody cares that we're meeting, the Christian church is irrelevant in the city where barriers and concerts and everything else will be more significant to the city around St. Columba's than the gospel.

But nonetheless, as we've been singing and praying and considering, we come before the living God who never changes. The first thing, so I'm going to say four things.

First thing, it matters what you believe. Second thing is, it matters that you believe with others. The third thing is your faith is as public as your body.

[2 : 47] And the fourth thing is true worship is all of life. Okay, so that's the four things we're going to look at briefly, I hope, this morning. First thing is therefore, it matters what you believe.

And the significance of that comes from that word which in some translations comes first in the chapter and in this translation, it's the fifth word, it's the word therefore, it's a link word.

I appeal to you, therefore brothers, it's a hinge word. And you see the word therefore, you know that it's a hinge word and that it's linking what has come before with what's going to come afterwards.

It's like the button of a coat that brings both sides of the coat together and closes it beautifully in order and symmetry. And so Paul is saying, because of what I've been saying in the first eleven chapters of Romans, therefore this is the practical outworking of these truths.

This cause and effect. He's saying this is, the first eleven chapters are all about truth and theology.

And now he says, he's been teaching about Jesus and the gospel and the nature of salvation, meaty theology, chunky, meaty, tough theology about God and about the gospel and about the church.

[4 : 04] And he's saying, because of these things, therefore this is how you live. And he's making that inexorable link between what we believe and how we live.

So it matters, he says, what we believe. And we don't have time, of course, to read the first eleven chapters. You can go home and read them. And I know you've read them before, many of you. But he kind of summarizes the whole gospel message in these eleven chapters, really strong meaty theology. And basically what Paul is saying is if you don't know these things, you'll never grow. You'll never grow as a Christian. If you have known real interest in the theology, which simply means the knowledge of God, if we don't have any interest in the knowledge of God, how He reveals Himself, how He explains Himself, how He describes Himself and His work and His salvation on our behalf, then we will never grow, because we will find the more we fall into seeking the character and nature of God, we will be challenged greatly about our understanding of the world and understanding of our own hearts and our understanding of the living and miraculous God. He will turn our thinking upside down. He will primarily make clear, as he does in these early chapters of Romans, that we deserve nothing from God but His eternal wrath, eternal judgment, even in the best of our motives and the best of our actions, there is an impurity that leaves us short of the perfect standard of the living God.

[5 : 54] And it's that terrible reality about our hearts. But it's the glorious truth also that in Christ we have absolutely everything.

We have renewal, we have forgiveness, we have a new heart and new life and new future that's unimaginably secure and glorious even as we grow older and become more wrinkly and weaker and eventually die.

We're becoming more alive and we go and live with Him in His presence forever. And that is the truth of Scripture. And the more that we know that, the more we understand that, the more therefore we will be able to give our lives in living sacrifice to Him.

So you know, when we speak about the spiritual disciplines, which we do here and we've got the grace groups to encourage that as well as the coming together and worship and fellowship and hospitality and all these things.

Spiritual disciplines, it's that daily prayer and it's that daily reading of Scripture is getting to know the truth and remaining in the truth and being plugged into the truth because that transforms who we are, it transforms how we think as we get to know Jesus Christ better.

[7 : 17] The prayer is our response to that, the prayer is our coming to Him in need and is building that relationship with Him. Therefore, and it's interesting isn't it really that He sums up the first eleven chapters.

You read these chapters and there's quite tough stuff going on in these chapters. He summarizes it in this verse basically, the mercies of God. That's how He summarizes all that truth in the first eleven chapters of Romans.

It's God's, therefore He says by the mercies of God and He's thinking back to these eleven chapters. It sums up the motive behind all we do, all we are, all we think.

It's God's great mercy in Christ. It's His sacrificial and unending love that we will celebrate in the Lord's Supper shortly. And He is the one who swallowed God's perfect wrath against us and took the punishment that we deserve.

It was meted out on Him because He wanted us back, because He wanted us in relationship with Him. He is in effect the living sacrifice.

[8 : 32] He died and He rose again because He wants us back in relationship with Him. He doesn't want us separated from Him and in that place of darkness and danger.

It's free, it's full, it's, there is no alternative. And that's why Paul is so passionate about what he says. He got that.

Absolutely got that. It's all about God's mercy. And if you're an unbeliever here today and it's great to see you if you are and we're delighted that you're here, but can I say that even your breath today, your life today, your relationships today, your history up till now today has been because of the mercy of God that He's brought you here, the laughter, the love, the gifts, the relationships, all because of His mercy, all because He wants you to consider His Son Jesus Christ and the salvation that He offers.

And I hope you will do that today. So it matters what you believe. All of us need to be reminded of that in our lives. And the second thing is it matters that you believe with others.

It really matters that you believe the gospel with others. I therefore appeal to you, brothers, He says, brothers and sisters, the church family, it's a letter, a public letter written to a church that's planted in Rome.

[9 : 53] And Paul was clearly committed and passionate in his relationship with this church. If you spin forward to chapter 16, you'll see that. It's one of my favorite chapters in the whole Bible where he just lists all the people that he loves and cares for, ask for them, ask for them.

Could you remember me to them? But he's only been there a short time and yet he says there's great relationship with all these people in the church because he knows and he realizes that belief is something that is important to be shared and to be lived out with others.

There's a commonality in our faith in Jesus Christ. It's hugely significant. We are royal priesthood, Peter says in 1 Peter 2.

We all have the same access to the Father through Jesus Christ. And that is tremendously significant, tremendously important for us to consider that it matters that we believe with others. Think around you today in St. Columba's. People who have never met one another before, people of different races, different characters, different backgrounds, people of different temperaments, likes and dislikes.

[11 : 06] But we're called to be a family together and we're called to live out this Christian life and this truth and be living sacrifices together, not simply alone.

We'll come back to that in a little while. Now the question goes out, what place does the church have in your life, in your Christian life, the church family? I don't mean the church service per se, that's an outworking of the church family, but I mean the church as a family, as a people.

What place does the church have in your life? It's tremendously significant because it matters not only what we believe but that you believe with others.

And Paul recognized that and he had a passionate concern for that reality. He says, I appeal to you. He says, I urge you. This wasn't some kind of dispassionate lecturer at the front giving some kind of intellectual, theological reason why it's good to be together.

He's passionate. He's urging them. He's appealing to them. With brotherly love and friendship, the word behind that is used here for appeal is a kind of powerful, persuasive, personal plea of a defending lawyer before a jury.

[12 : 22] You know, you see them in the films, passionately defend their client because it's real and it's significant to them, or maybe isn't but that's their job.

But for us it is real. And he's able to say what he can say because he loves them and because there's relationship with them and there's a spiritual openness and an accountability of love and care.

So he can be passionate as he appeals and he can speak in that way. Now, I think that's one thing we need to work on in St. Columbus.

It's something we have to work on. It's something we're not that great at sometimes. We're great at fellowship, we're great at friendship, we're great at talking about the weather and the football and the traffic and what it's like to be in the high street and everything else.

What do we talk about? Are we accountable to one another spiritually? Can we appeal to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ about our spiritual lives? Is there that openness and intimacy and trust and honesty?

[13 : 25] I think we always are working on that as believers. It's not a critical statement. It's a reality for us that we're a growing community and it's something that is good to work on because our commitment and our involvement is always, it must be more than turning up simply on a Sunday.

It's about doing life and being accountable to one another. And it's not about looking at others to ask them to be accountable. It's each of our responsibilities and duties so to do.

Second thing. Third thing is that your faith is as, it's a strange thing to say maybe, your faith is as public as your body.

Your faith is as public as your body by the mercies of God, He says, to present your bodies. He doesn't say present your brain. He doesn't say present your soul.

He says present your bodies. And that's a very deliberate statement by Paul into the Greco-Roman world in which he's living where the background thinking and the secularity of their thinking was very much that the body was evil.

[14 : 32] And it was all about what was internal and all about your soul and all about having special spiritual insights. And it's very much today for us, it's countering the idea that our faith is simply something private, something just mystical.

And it's a spiritual lay-by in our life that we eventually, you know, we go into now and again to get some, it's like going to a petrol station for fuel.

We go in occasionally and we get stacked up again and then we live our lives. And I think sometimes we add that, I add into that misunderstanding.

Sometimes I think by the way we often talk about our heart, the importance of our heart being right and having a heart relationship with God, which is absolutely true of course, absolutely and hugely important, but only as the heart is the seat of our emotion, our will, our actions and our bodies.

That is our soul. We're fused together, body and soul. We should never separate the two. We're living, we're incarnate Christians, just as God was incarnate in Jesus Christ.

[15 : 46] We are to incarnate what is private and personal to us in our bodies, in our life. We are to present our bodies. Our bodies are not prisons, our bodies are not unspiritual.

Our bodies reflect, our bodies is what people see, isn't it? They don't see your soul. They don't see your faith. They don't see your beliefs.

These are invisible things, but they see your body. They see your physicality. And that is hugely important that we incarnate our faith.

People are saying, our faith is to be seen, to be heard, to be witnessed. With our eyes and with our ears, it's to be tangible.

This is a great earthy verse. It's saying that wherever you go, people see your body, isn't it? That's what they see. They see your face. They see your eyes.

[16 : 45] They see your form. And where they see that, they are to see Christ. In everything that we do, what we say, how we respond, how we react, how we think, how we behave, it's all related to our bodies and where to take Christ with us.

And that is what He really means when He talks about being living sacrifices. Christ ultimately became the only living sacrifice.

He died and He rose again and the lamb at the center of the throne as the marks of the crucified one. But we are to take this imagery here.

We're not to be sacrificial. We're not to sacrifice something every now and again. Our lives are not to give off the odd sacrifice.

We are to be one. Something about us were to be a living sacrifice. It's temple terminology that Paul is using here that would have filtered right through all the Old Testament and all the sacrificial offerings that were made.

[17 : 56] And he's speaking here about the offering of the whole lamb, the whole burnt offering where it was given to God in thanksgiving with a deliberate intentionality of consecrating everything.

There's a symbol of consecrating everything to the Lord, giving everything to Him as a living sacrifice. Christ was the burnt off, Christ died. He was the sacrificial sin offering. But this is the life we live in response to what Christ has done for us.

Jesus speaks about it in Luke 9, 23, 24 where He says, whoever wants to be my disciple must deny him, take up their cross and daily and follow me. Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.

That's the great paradox of the gospel, isn't it? We have to be living sacrifices. The Holy Spirit in us is what the interesting thing is, the Holy Spirit in us is life.

So we're giving life in the Holy Spirit, spiritual life, relationship with God, connection with the Trinity and that. The most remarkable of ways, and yet part of His work in our lives is to put things to death.

[19 : 13] That's the paradox. He, as the giver of life, is working in us to put to death the selfishness and the sin in our hearts and in our behavior. So one of the critical realities of being a living sacrifice, paradoxically, is both positive and negative.

It's putting God and others first and putting others before ourselves. And that's what it means to be a living sacrifice.

It means that we're dependent and looking to God to how to act, to speak, to respond, to live today. That's where my body is.

That's where God is. That's where the Spirit is. I was speaking with someone recently who's talking about prayer and the significance of prayer and saying, not that we pray, not that we come together and pray, not that we do prayer, we are prayer.

That's a great description of the church, of the Christian. We are prayer because we're in that relationship of a living sacrificial commitment and consecration to the living God.

[20 : 24] We are not in our lives to have an ejector seat or a locked door where God gains no entry or where God is ejected.

It is to be that life where we live in Him and for Him. And you know the greatest thing about this, the greatest thing about this is that we have a mandate.

Now, be careful. Don't write this down and take it away with you. Don't quote me on it. We have a mandate to fail. That's the great thing about this freedom we have in Christ, to be living sacrifices. We have a mandate to fail and to make errors and to fail in His name. Why do I say that? Well, in 1 John, which we looked at recently, chapter 1 and verse 8, it says, if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins, He's faithful and just to forgive us our sins. You know the reality of living sacrifices is we have a mandate to fail. Not deliberately, not because we want to fail, not because it's good fun to fail, but because we simply do.

[21 : 42] And the great thing is all we're asked to do is, when all the brutal honesty that we can muster, go back to God and ask for His grace and forgiveness. That's what it means to be a living sacrifice, is to go back to God again and again and again with all our failure.

Isn't that freedom? Isn't that freedom that we can go back to God with our failure and be forgiven and not to weigh on us and not to think that we have to earn some things with God?

And if I do good today, if I read my Bible, if I try my hardest, it'll be a blessed day. Bing, bang, bong, God, it'll bless me. Quid pro quo, if I do my best and He does, then He'll do His best and give me.

That's not what it's like. We go to Him, needy, empty, weak, failed, fallen, miserable, and we come to Him for filling and for forgiveness and for hope and for grace and for a future.

That's what it means to be a living sacrifice. That's what freedom is. It's, you know, what it's like if you've got a real pain in your back or your side or somewhere else, you can ignore it and you can try and carry on living.

[22 : 45] It's like it's worse and worse. Or you can go to the doctor and you can admit your weakness and your need and your pain and your suffering on the road to healing, hopefully.

It doesn't work in every case, physically. It's the world we live in, but spiritually it does. We can hide the pain and the suffering and the mistakes and think we can just battle on regardless on our own strength.

Or we can go to the one who says, look, you're a living sacrifice. Just offer yourself again before me in that relationship. Holy and pleasing, he says to God, is the kind of sacrifice.

That's what Paul is pleading about, set apart as a child of God in God's company. Pleasing Him. Can I say pleasing Him even in failure?

His love doesn't move up or down according to our obedience, but He is pleased when we come back to Him. Just read the parable of the prodigal son or the prodigal father, which is probably a better description of it.

[23 : 50] The prodigality of His love, He doesn't wag His finger and make demands of the Son who's gone and His eating pigs swill for His dinner. He has His open arms because He's come back and He's confessed, Father, I have nothing to say to Him.

He was one of your higher slaves. He says, no, you will get a ring in your finger. Magnificent, magnificent reality that even in failure, failure is a sign that we're putting to death if we take our failure in confession.

That we're putting to death the sin in our hearts. That's where it is. That's where growth comes from. There's no growth if we're not confessing our failure. Now, don't get self-righteous on me, don't become a hypocrite and say, well, that's just an excuse to live anyway.

It's not. It's a recognition of our hearts and it's a recognition that it's incoming to Him in confession that we know healing and we know hope and strengthening and peace and protection.

It pleases Him when we come to Him in our failure asking for His grace. What do you think your Christian faith involves?

[25 : 04] When did you last, when did I last speak seriously to God about my heart? When did you last speak to Him about your heart, about your motives, about your daily life, about your failings?

Do you think you're trying to come into God's presence, clean and nice and good? Is that what you're waiting for? Man, you'll be old and wrinkly then before you do.

We come because we need Him. We come because that is what a living sacrifice is. It's putting to death, recognizing and putting to death our sinful natures and being filled and overflowing with the love of Christ.

It's the third thing. And lastly and very briefly, true worship is all of life. It's present to God, your body's living side, holy and acceptable, which is your spiritual worship, which is your...

It can be translated reasonable, logical. It's the word that we get logical from. It's also our living life.

[26 : 08] Every breath that we take is we're worshipping. So I'm not really speaking primarily about church today, about church attendance. More significant and important that is, and get me on that, I recognize that absolutely.

Worship together is critically important for our understanding, for our encouragement, for our accountability, for our community together. But worship is everything that we do.

Everything that we do. You arise from here and that will be how you worship. It's what we are the other 166 hours of the week that matters as well as this two hours of the year.

That's what matters. We're living sacrifice. Everywhere your body goes, you're worshipping as a believer or not as a believer.

If he's not your Lord, then it's either yourself or something else that you're worshipping. But you are worshipping and I am worshipping and we are to take him everywhere with us in all that we do.

[27 : 09] True worship is all of life and that makes sense. That is reasonable, that is logical, that is spiritual.

And that's going all the way back to Romans chapter 111, it's truth and theology. If God is our Creator, if He has shown Himself in preparatory ways through the Old Testament and if He has shown Himself in Jesus Christ, then it makes perfect sense that what He has done for us should mean in response to Him that we have this incredible, consecrated, wholehearted, fulsome, enjoyable life in His company.

But if we hold back, and we all do it, if we hold back, if we keep loving sin before Christ, then we're dying inside. Our love is dying, our faith is dying, our joy is dying, our peace is dying because we need to be in His company.

Grace, it's illogical, it's an illogical way of living. Response of grace is always gratitude. The two words come from the same Greek root and that's greatness.

When we know God's grace, then we respond by living lives of gratitude. Now I'll finish with that.

Our Amy and Ben, you know, some of you will know we got married, my daughter got married to here last Saturday.

[28 : 31] Great day it was, great celebration and love. And they commit themselves, they wrote their own vows, beautiful vows, Christ-centered vows, they read together. But wouldn't it have been strange if after the wedding that Amy went back to Gilmerton and Ben went back to Nidra and they lived in their own flats and they didn't ever get together and they didn't live as one?

Now that's just a poor example. But isn't that strange if we come to Christ and He's given us everything and then we go and, having confessed Him, we go and live our own lives in our own ways if He's not there at all, in our own homes, in our own hearts, in our own lives, just without Him. It's our spiritual worship. That is, it's nothing ceremonial, it's nothing ritualistic.

It comes from our hearts for sure, but it is revealed in our lives and in our bodies. Let's let His light today plunge into our hearts to fight our doubts, our failure, our sin, our fear, and consider, as you sit at the Lord's table, how, and pray about how you react, how you deal with challenges, persecution, opposition, confusion.

Remember we are hidden in Christ, but we're revealed to the world. Amen. Let's pray. God, help us to understand your way and your truth and your life, and bless us now as we celebrate the Lord's Supper.

[29 : 59] Amen.