

Life as Worship

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Date: 09 April 2017

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[0 : 0 0] Well, over the past few months on Sunday evenings, we've been working through a series on worship, and we've been focusing on the elements of corporate worship, what we do here on a Sunday gathering.

But worship is not just an activity we do once a week, and then switch off. This evening, we're going to think a bit about worship in the context of Monday to Saturday. So the six other days, we're going to look at life as worship.

And we're going to do this by looking at Romans chapter 12, so if you have a Bible, you might find it helpful to have it open there. So tonight, we're thinking about the whole of life as worship, and I want to break it down into two questions.

The first, what is a true life of worship? What's involved? Second, how do we live that out? What does that look like? So first of all, what is a true life of worship?

You might remember back at the beginning of our series, Corey defined worship as the outworking of a heart directed towards something of value. You see, worship is fundamentally the ascribing of value to something.

[1 : 0 8] It's an outpouring of something in us into something. And the reason it's so important to think about worship is that you do it. Every one of you is a worshiper.

Worship is something that comes naturally to us as human beings. Paul Trip, a pastor and author in the US, said this. He said that human beings, by their very nature, are worshippers.

You see, worship is not just something we do, it defines who we are. You cannot divide human beings into those who worship and those who don't. Everybody worships, it's just a matter of what or whom you serve.

So worship is something that's instinctive to us. And Paul makes that so clear right back at the beginning of this book in chapter 1. He says, all human beings know deep down that they're made to serve God.

But we choose to suppress that truth. We turn and worship other things in God's place. So what does that mean? Well, the great musician Bob Dylan put it like this.

[2 : 1 2] You've got to serve somebody. Romans 1 means the question is not, do you worship? But what do you worship? What is the content of your worship?

What is the object you are focused on? There's a postmodern novelist called David Foster Wallace. He's written a few books like *Infinite Jest* and *The Pale King*. He said that everyone is looking for real meaning in life.

And whatever you use to do that, whether it's money, sex, power, intellect, whatever it is, it's essentially a form of worship. He goes on to explain that each form of worship does not merely make you fragile and exhausted, but it can eat you alive.

If you've read *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien, you'll know the character Gollum. You might have seen the films. Gollum's ultimate desire in *The Lord of the Rings* is for the ring of power.

It's something he craves and desires above all else. And for a while he possesses this ring. He has this ring. He cherishes it. He loves it. He worships this ring. But it slowly consumes him.

[3 : 18] It's a thing he wanted more than anything in the world, but he becomes filled with hate, bitter and jealousy. It was never enough. Now, Gollum is an extreme example, but in a similar way, the things we long for, the things we desire, the things our hearts value most, have the potential to be incredibly destructive.

We know that. The things that we long for, as David Foster-Wall's put it, can eat us alive. So the point is, if the object of our worship is something other than God, it will never deliver the fulfillment we're looking for.

It will never ultimately satisfy an affirm. And this is not a new phenomenon. It's not a problem just for our post-Moran culture. St. Augustine, back in the fourth century, put it like this in his Confessions.

He said, Our hearts are restless until they find our rest in God. So the point is, everyone is a worshiper. What does a true life of worship look like then?

This is what Paul is getting at here in the beginning of chapter 12, verse 1. I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, present your bodies as a living sacrifice, wholly and acceptable to God.

[4 : 39] This is your spiritual worship. So what does that mean? What does it mean to present your body as a living sacrifice? I mean, the whole concept of a sacrifice is pretty alien to us today.

We don't really come across sacrifices in 21st century Edinburgh. But for those back in the first century to Paul's writing, it's a familiar concept.

So Paul's using this imagery as a metaphor to teach us about our worship. See, when you think of a sacrifice, you generally think of something that's killed, something that's taken, that's alive, and then it's slaughtered on an altar.

But Paul's calling us here for a living sacrifice. It's fundamentally about lifestyle. It's about the way we live in this world. The 16th century reformer, John Calvin, put it like this.

He said, When Paul speaks about bodies here, he does not mean only our bones and our flesh, but all that we are. Our whole being. That includes our thoughts, our emotions, our wills, our desires.

[5 : 43] In other words, the whole of human life is an act of worship. Paul writes elsewhere in Philippians chapter 1, It is my eager expectation and hope that Christ will be honoured in my body.

What this means is that our whole life is important to God. That includes our physicality. It includes the things we do during the week.

Your work, your studies, the time you spend with family and friends, your relationships, your leisure time, how you live and act and speak and think in these aspects of life is important to God.

The theologian Douglas Mew put it like this. He said that worship is a 24-7 matter. Of course, corporate worship is critical. It's so important. But we worship God when we show love to others, when we do our jobs faithfully and with integrity, when we nurture our families.

God wants us always to be bringing glory to Him by the way we live. Now, Paul says three things about this sacrifice. He says it's living, he says it's holy, and he says it's acceptable to God.

[6 : 59] Now, instantly this makes us think of Old Testament imagery, of Leviticus, of the priestly sacrificial system. I think we can make sense of understanding this by looking at what Paul says next.

He says here, this is your spiritual worship. And I think that's a fine translation. But it's interesting to note that the word Paul uses for worship is the noun *Latreia*.

And there's another more general word that the New Testament uses for worship. This word seems to have more precisely a sense of priestly service. This kind of cultic ritualistic imagery.

So what Paul is saying is, you know, present your body as a living sacrifice. This is your *Latreia*. This is your priestly service. In other words, what the priests once did in the temple, putting the head on the hand of the animal, offering up of its life and so on, Paul's applying this concept of ritualistic sacrifice as a metaphor for the daily Christian living.

Each day there is to be a giving up of ourselves to God. Each day there is to be a recognition that we are not truly our own. That, Paul says, is your true spiritual worship.

[8 : 12] You might have heard of the New City Catechism. It's taken the old concept of teaching through a question and answer model and it's supplying it with contemporary language. I think it's great. And question one says, what is our only hope in life and death?

It's that we're not our own. We are not our own, but we belong body and soul, both in life and in death, to God and to our Savior Jesus Christ. So that's our first point.

A true life of worship is about offering God your whole being. Not just your emotions, not just your mind, not just your soul, but your body, the things you do with your life. Everything that makes us us.

It means that you worship in your work, you worship in your family, in your relationships, everything you do, Monday to Saturday. So the second question, how do we live that out? How do we go about offering ourselves up to God?

Well, Paul follows this in verse two with two imperatives, two instructions. There's a negative and a positive. The negative don't be conformed to the pattern of the world and then the positive be transformed by the renewal of your mind.

[9 : 23] So don't be conformed to the pattern of the world. In other words, don't let the world squeeze you into its mold. Think about some of the things that drive our culture, that drive our world.

Consumerism. The desire for success and advancement at all costs. The kind of pleasure principle. The desire for instant gratification wherever we can find it.

And it never delivers. We know that. See, whatever we worship also becomes a source of identity for us. Whether that's money, career, sexual relationships, whatever it is we look to for fulfillment and affirmation becomes a source of identity.

Now Paul is saying there's a danger that the mindset of the world gets caught up in our identity. That it influences the way we live in the world. We're very good at naturally compartmentalizing our lives.

We're maybe quite happy to give God center stage on a Sunday, but the rest of the week belongs to us. Now Paul is not saying you need to withdraw from the world, but don't imitate it. Don't allow it to influence you.

[10 : 37] Don't let its thinking shape you. Don't give to other things what rightly belongs to God as the world does. So that's the negative. The positive. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

The mind is really fascinating. There's so much in Scripture about the human mind. In Romans 1, when Paul is talking about human depravity, there's a clear focus on the mind.

It's what people know cognitively to be true. They suppress that through their wickedness. Then on in chapter 7, there's this great battle in the mind. A desire to serve God, to worship God, and the desires of sin.

In chapter 8, that battle continues. Paul writes in verse 5, those who live according to the flesh have their mindset on what the flesh desires. But those who live in accordance with the spirit have their mindset on what the spirit desires.

The mind that is governed by flesh is death. But the mind governed by spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God. It does not submit to his law, nor can it do so.

[11 : 48] And now here in chapter 12, Paul continues this imagery by setting up this great contrast. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.

Either you will worship the true God, or you will worship other things in his place. Now we depend on the power of the Holy Spirit for that transformation.

To shape our minds, to transform us into true worshipers. Don't be conformed, Paul says, be transformed. How else do we worship God with our whole being?

I want to take a step back and look at it as a life of worship that is rooted firmly in the Gospel. We don't look at these verses in isolation.

What Paul says in verse 1 is really interesting. He says, therefore, by the mercies of God. Therefore is a really important word. These two verses, most scholars agree, act as a transition in Romans.

[12 : 49] In 1-11, Paul has laid out these great gospel truths. He's laid out this fulsome exposition of human salvation. He goes through the problems of sin, salvation through faith, freedom from sin, victory in Christ, sanctification, all these great doctrines.

In chapter 10, he summarizes, if you declare with your mouth Jesus's Lord, and you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it's with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it's with your mouth that you profess and are saved.

Now he says in verse 1, therefore, by the mercies of God, by all that we've been talking about, we have this transition from the truth of the Gospel to the implications of the Gospel.

It's like a shift from doctrine to ethics. And that happens quite a lot in the New Testament. It's a helpful way to read it. It's what some people call an indicative imperative.

It's basically, this is how things are, this is what God has done, therefore, in light of that, this is how you should live. And that order is so important.

[14 : 00] What it means is that our worship is grounded in what God has done. It's not the case that you just need to worship God more so he will accept you. It's not the case that you guys aren't worshipping, so you need to worship.

Paul is saying, think about all that God has done for you in Christ. Think about God's mercies and let that lead you to hold nothing back. The ultimate example of what we're thinking about has to be what Corey was speaking about this morning.

Christ sacrificed for us. His sacrifice for you. His sacrifice for me. Jesus Christ's suffering on the cross mocked, beaten, humiliated, forsaken for us.

It just encapsulates that whole idea of offering your body as a living sacrifice. The crux of that for Jesus was to literally put his body for us on the cross.

Tim Keller at Gospel Coalition conference last week said that there's a principle at the very heart of this reality. It's my life for yours.

[15 : 08] Sin, he says, distorts things and makes us operate everything on the principle, your life for me. What can I gain from this person? What can I benefit? What can I take from this situation?

But he says, Jesus Christ turns that upside down. He says, my life for you. I sacrifice for you. Every day, every hour, Keller says, we are faced with that choice.

Which of those operating principles do we follow? So a true life of worship is grounded in the Gospel. Now briefly, life of worship means a life of transformation.

So when Paul speaks about the renewal of your mind, he's talking about more than an intellectual ascent to some doctrine. He's talking about more than just some kind of understanding in your mind of something.

And that's important. Doctrine is important. But we need to experience God's transformation. His power at working us through His Spirit to sanctify us, to change us.

[16 : 16] Jonathan Edwards, a great American preacher a few centuries back, used the illustration of the Christian being like the butterfly. You've probably heard it before. He said that a Christian whose lifestyle doesn't noticeably change, doesn't show any sign of transformation, is like a butterfly to crawl miserably along a branch as if it was still a caterpillar.

It's absurd. It doesn't compute. A butterfly has gone through a radical transformation. So for it to come out of that cocoon and to continue acting and living and thinking as if it was still a caterpillar, is absurd.

How much more absurd then, he says, is it for a Christian to follow Jesus Christ, to claim to know Him and love Him, but not show any sign of that in their Monday to Saturday life, to turn up at church for an hour, but to not display that transformation in the workplace, in their families, in their social settings.

See, we undergo a lifelong process of transformation. The gospel changes the way we think, it changes the way we speak, the way we act. It changes the way we interact with our world.

It changes fundamentally the way we value things. C.S. Lewis said that all of life's good pleasures, the good things we enjoy in life, should lead a Christian to worship, to adoration.

[17 : 42] He says that a beautiful view, delicious food, the arts, literature, a great piece of music, sport, all these things we enjoy with our mind must run back, he says, up the sunbeam to the sun.

These things should lead us to worship. Now, one final question. What is life for? We're taking a big step back here. What is life for?

If you were stopped on the street and you were asked, what are you living for? What is at the core of your existence? What would you say? It's a challenging question, and it's a question that consumes people.

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, a science fiction novel, they go and build a supercomputer specifically to answer this question. And it takes this computer seven and a half million years to come up with an answer.

What is the ultimate answer to the question of life, the universe and everything else? 42. It's underwhelming. It's completely meaningless.

[18 : 51] And for a lot of people out there, it might as well be their answer. What is the meaning of life? We go through the motions, we eat, we sleep, we work, we relax, we play, we die.

Life can feel truly meaningless. And everyone at some level is deep down conscious of the need of a sense of purpose. We can't truly live as human beings without ascribing meaning to something outside ourselves.

It's really interesting. One agnostic wrote on a blog, if all the significance of all great human achievements can be reduced to some neurons firing in my brain, then surely it's all destined to be extinguished at death.

And it goes on to write, considering that the entire span of human existence on Earth wouldn't amount to a blip on the radar screen of a five billion year old universe. It seems silly to pretend like the 60 odd year life of some random organism and one of trillions of planets was anything special.

By simply living my life, I felt like I was living a lie. I acknowledged the truth that life was meaningless. And yet, every day I would act as if my life had meaning.

[20 : 04] The hope and the love and the joy I experienced on a daily basis was something real, something more than chemicals firing in my brain. So the point here is, you can't get away from the fact that human beings have an inbuilt desire for meaning, for purpose.

And understanding that you're created as a worshiper explains that. It gives you a real tangible purpose in life. So let's look at the answer to this question.

What is the primary purpose of humanity? What are we here for? What are we all about? Our primary purpose is to glorify God and in doing so enjoy Him forever.

To live a life of true worship of the one true God and to find ultimate fulfillment and satisfaction in Him. And as I've just put it, it is then that the door at which you've been knocking your whole life will be opened at last.

So just to draw things together, all of life is worship of something. We worship God here on a Sunday, but you also worship Him in your work tomorrow.

[21 : 18] Worship Him as you study, as you learn things at university. Worship Him in your relationships. Worship Him with your family. Worship Him in the things you enjoy doing in life.

Worship Him with your whole being. I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.

This is your spiritual worship. Don't be conformed, be transformed. I'll finish with John Calvin. He says that the whole Christian life, the whole Christian worship can be summed up in a single statement.

1 Corinthians 6, verse 19, You are not your own, for you were bought with a price, so glorify God in your body. May He help us, so to do. Amen.