

Worship

Rom.12;1 (NIV)

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All over the world today people are worshipping because men and women have a natural ability and inclination to do it. The worshippers can be religious or atheist. Their devotion might be directed to God, or a god. . . . to the unknown God, or to many gods. There are hundreds of religions in the world, and within each religion you are likely to find different ideas of worship. The main factor in a person's worship is his or her idea of "God". The second is the nature of the worshipper. Because there are so many different ideas of "God", we are not surprised to find major differences between the various religions.

Romans 1 explains that the one, true and living God has revealed Himself to all humanity. His power and divinity have been made known to us. However, we have rejected His self-revelation. As well as His general revelation, the One true God has spoken to us in the uniquely inspired message of the Bible. He has also sent His Son into the world and spoken to us through His teaching, His ministry, and His example. These are all historical facts. But the human race has rejected the self-revelation of the One, True, and Living God. Instead of worshipping Him, people worship substitute gods of various kinds (Rom 1:18-22). Even among Christians, "worship" can be seriously compromised (e.g. Isa 29;13 Mt 6;24).

The Letter to the Romans answers both of the big questions we can ask: "How can I know God ?" and "How can I worship God ?" Although there is some overlap between the two sections, we can summarise by saying that Chs.1-11 answer the first question, and Chs.12-16 the second.

Romans 1-3 describes our utter alienation from God.

Romans 4-5 explains that it is through faith in what CHRIST has done in history that we can be reconciled to our Creator.

Romans 6-8 outlines the nature of the Christian life.

Romans 9-11 reminds us that God is sovereign and that He is working to His eternal plan,

And only **then**, and **on the basis of all that has gone before**, we are commanded to totally commit ourselves to the Lord in 12;1-2.

"How can I know God ?" Through faith in Christ.

"How should I worship God ?" The answer to this question begins in Rom.12;1. Do you see where the worship fits in ? The worship follows the Bible's declaration (and our understanding) of the "wisdom", the "knowledge" and the eternal purposes of God (Rom 11;33,36). He is such a GREAT GOD !!!

When we understand how great He is, we **MUST** worship (Ps 95;3-7)

The only question is: How does HE want us to worship Him?

The passage begins with

1. A POWERFUL REQUEST

Therefore, I urge you, brothers

speaking to students whom he does not know. He is appealing to his brothers and sisters in Christ. He calls on his friends to make a **considered response** to the gospel. He appeals to their **reason**. This is the way of the gospel.

"*Therefore*" (12;1) looks back to what has been said earlier in the Letter. But

it goes beyond that because it talks about “*sacrifices*”. For hundreds and hundreds of years, the worship of God's people involved various kinds of sacrifices. Referring to that system of worship Heb 9;22 summarises in these words: “*the law (of Moses) requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness..*”

The people were forcibly reminded of the seriousness of their disobedience to God. The death penalty they deserved because of their wrongdoing was being transferred to the animals being sacrificed. The whole system of worship was preparing people for the day when Jesus Christ “*the Lamb of God*” would be slain for the sins of the world.

No sacrifice ever made **even begins to approach that sacrifice in importance**. The cross of Christ towers far above any human effort to make up for our rebellion against God. The Bible says simply: (Col 1;19-20) “. . . *it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fulness to dwell in (Christ), and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross*”.

All our ideas of worship must be linked to Christ and His cross. That is what the word “*therefore*” indicates in Rom 12;1. **Christian worship is about our response to what Christ has done on our behalf**. The duty that Paul is urging on his fellow-Christians is a

2. A PLAIN RESPONSIBILITY

Our responsibility as Christians arises from all that God has done for us in Christ. And it's plain for all to see.

When it comes to explaining our responsibility, God does not bypass the mind. The Bible deliberately addresses our minds. Any idea of worship or serving God that violates, or denies the place of the mind, is wrong. God has created us rational beings. He wants us to make a reasoned response to His Son's death on the cross for us.

Brothers and sisters, we should always be on the lookout for mindless Christianity because it doesn't deliver. The Bible is “the word of truth” (Jas 1;18). This is the instrument God uses to bring us into His family (1Pet 1;22-23) and bring us to spiritual maturity (2Tim 3;16-17). It is possible to have religious experiences and be deeply stirred by what is called “worship” without any reference to God's Word. For example, today there are churches where the worship activities play on people's emotions. This is NOT to say that we should not make an emotional response to all that God has done for us. But if the main impact and the personal response are at an emotional level it is unhelpful.

God has explained to us the kind of worship that is acceptable to Him. Any idea of worship that is not centred on the Bible must be rejected. The Lord God has spoken. He has told us what service pleases Him, and is acceptable to Him. He expects us to make a thoughtful response to what He has done for us. Why should we serve God as described in Rom.12;1-2 ? Because of what He has done in our lives through Christ. To deny the centrality of the cross in our lives and our service is an affront to God who sent His Son to save us. If Christ had not died, we would still be in our sins, and there would be no relationship between us and God. There would be no possibility of worshipping God as our Heavenly Father. But the fact is, we have this marvellous privilege. As those who know God personally, and are in right relationship with Him, we **can** worship Him.

In the Bible, there are close links between the ideas of “worship”, and

“service” and both have their basis in “*the mercies of God*” (Rom 12;1). This is

3. A PRESSING REASON for worship.

The Christian life is all about "mercy" - God's mercy. Although we were sinners deserving of judgement and death, the Lord had mercy on us.

Tit. 3:5 says: “*He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. . . .*”

There is no more pressing reason, no more powerful incentive to worship God, than a clear understanding of the greatness of His mercy towards us. Then we should make . . .

4. A PERSONAL RESPONSE vv.1-2

The response involves the “presentation of our bodies as a living and holy sacrifice”, and the transformation of our minds (v.2). And God says: “**This is your spiritual worship**”.

Now, several things get in the way of “spiritual worship”.

- 1) *Manmade Traditions* which have not been tested by the Bible
- 2) *Superstitions* - i.e. beliefs based, not on fact, but on ignorance.
- 3) *Externalism* where the emphasis is on spectacle, rituals, and decorations such as symbols, statues, and icons. The Lord is looking at our hearts! (1Sam 16;7)
- 4) *Rigidity* or unwillingness to change, even when current practice contradicts the Bible.

Not surprisingly, many ideas of Christian “worship” are limited to those times when God's people meet together. But this idea is foreign to the New Testament. The verbs - the action-words - in Rom 12;1-2a are in the Present, Continuing Tense. In other words, the self-offering of our bodies, and the renewal of our minds should be continuous. It's not about an hour a week in a church building. Every hour of every day we should “Worship”.

Some think that you have to go to a special building to worship. But we are not Old Testament Jews! The Bible says WE ourselves are “*the temple*” of God (1Cor 3:16-17 & 6:19-20). Many make a hard and fast distinction between “worship” and the other activities in the life of the Christian. This reduces our “worship” to a fraction of what it ought to be. Consider

- Kitchen sign: “Divine service performed here three times daily”
 - 1Cor 10;31 “*Whether you eat, or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*”
 - 'If you can't do great things, do small things greatly.'
- Do whatever you do, for the Lord. Do it with excellence !

We are to “keep on *offering our*) bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.” And we must refuse to let the world squeeze us into its mould. Instead, we are to “be continually transformed by the renewing of (our) minds.

In effect God says that worship without sacrifice is no worship at all. In dying on the cross, Jesus has made "a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world" (Prayer Book HC). Well, what is the sacrifice that God requires of us ? Romans 12;1 says: “*Your bodies.*” God wants us to offer ourselves in His service . . . sacrificially.

Immediately we can see how this dispels any concept of comfortable, costless Christianity. Gone is the idea that I can claim to be a Christian while I coast

along and offer God what's left after I've done what I wanted.

Christianity is worked out **in the body of the Christian**. We are to live in the real world in obedience to God's Word. We are to be faithful to Him, not only in the way we **think**, and in the commitment of our **hearts**, but in the **physical outworking** of our faith in Christ. What we ARE is more important than what we DO, but what we DO tells us what we ARE.

Rom.12;1-2 means that every part of our lives can, and should be dedicated to the service of God. It is not necessary to be in a church building, or in the company of other Christians. We can “worship” in the ordinary routine of our daily lives.

There may be no hymn singing or prayers. It can happen in a coal mine or an office. The farmer can serve God in his farming, and the student in his study. The ageing and the invalid have a vital role to play.

CONCLUSION

Many Christians have thought of worship in terms of hymns and organs, prayers and readings, sermons and sacraments. But **Christian worship is a much, much bigger issue**. And when we worship as GOD requires, we are spiritually enriched, and He is truly honoured. The opening words of Rom 12 are the key. . . . *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.”*
