

Today we're finishing up our series on worship. We've learned we all worship something or someone. There's actually no such thing as atheism. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And what we worship is all about what we value most. When we worship God, we're declaring he's what we really value, and that nothing else will satisfy us but him. Only he can turn a world of grey into a life in color.

One of the things we fail to realize is that worship isn't just something we do for an hour or so on Sunday mornings when we come to church, but it's something that involves all of life. It's like fitness. You can be very disciplined about getting a workout in every day for an hour, but if you ignore fitness in the rest of your life, then it will be compromised. I used to think if I just worked out every day, I could eat to my heart's desire, but that doesn't work. Fitness involves more than a daily workout. It involves the choices we make all day long — what we eat and drink; how we handle stress; getting enough sleep; managing medications, etc. Fitness isn't an hour a day thing; it's an all of life thing.

It's the same with worship. Worship isn't just something we do on Sunday morning. Sometimes we even reduce worship not just to what we do at church on Sunday, but to a specific activity we do at church, namely singing. We often say things like, "Before the sermon, we'll have 20 minutes of worship. Who's leading worship this morning? It's a communion Sunday, so we only have 15 minutes of worship today."

If you said something like that to a first century Christian, you'd get some really strange looks! For example, listen to what the apostle Paul wrote to the church in Rome.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:1-2

Notice right in the middle of these two verses, is the word, worship. That word worship is a translation of a Greek word, which can also be translated as service. Have you ever wondered why we sometimes call this a worship service? Could it be worship is service, and service is worship? Could it be worship is something far broader than what we do on Sunday morning?

Notice Paul also calls this, true and proper worship. We should ask, "What is true and proper worship? How do you know if what you're calling worship really is worship?" Don't underestimate how easy it is to get this wrong. God said through the prophet Isaiah, "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught" (Is 29:13). Jesus quoted those exact words in the Gospel of Matthew, accusing the religious leaders of doing just that.

Let's take these two verses apart and see what they can tell us about true and proper worship.

True and proper worship is motivated by God's mercies

The first thing this tells us about true and proper worship is it's motivated by the mercies of God. Paul says, "Therefore, I urge you...in view of God's mercy..." Before he tells us what worship is, he reminds us of the why. He digs beneath behavior and gets to motive. In a moment, he'll tell us what we can offer to God that will please him more than anything else. But why? Why offer him anything at all? It begs the question, why do we worship?

Some of us worship out of fear. Perhaps we fear we might lose God's blessing or even our salvation. God will finally just say, "I've had enough. I'm done with you!" Or perhaps we fear God will inflict us with a terrible trial. But fear-based worship loses its steam over time. It may move you to great feats at first, but eventually, it will exhaust you; you'll become too tired to even care. Fear-based worship will also lead you to be less than transparent with God. You won't have the security to admit your sins for fear of reprisal from him, so you do a lot of rationalizing and blaming. Fear-based worship will also make it hard to endure trials because when they come, you'll think God is paying you back for doing bad things, or you'll get mad at God because you think you deserve better.

But when Paul says, "...in view of God's mercy," he's saying, "We don't worship God out fear, but because of his great mercy." By the way, Paul uses the plural here, so it's literally his mercies. For eleven chapters of Romans, he's been unfolding God's mercies. The Gospel is God's mercy to undeserving sinners. We were under God's judgment. Back in Romans 3:9, he said, we're "all under the power of sin." That means we're all subject to God's judgment and condemnation. That's what we deserve. But God's mercy is such that he gave his Son to die for us; he forgave us

and made us righteous in his sight by faith; he sent his life-giving Spirit to dwell within us and he promised us eternal glory. These are the mercies of God, and they're the "why" behind our worship.

True and proper worship is offering our bodies to God

The second thing we learn about true and proper worship is it's an offering of our bodies to God. Paul urges us, "Offer your bodies as living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God." He uses terminology from the Jewish temple. He pictures a worshipper at the temple who comes with an offering. Some of the offerings in the Old Testament were called sin-offerings, where the blood of the animal was the basis for forgiveness. But we know Jesus is our sin offering. He shed his blood for us, and we can't add anything to that. So, this isn't a sin offering. There were other offerings called whole burnt offerings. You'd take an animal from your flock that was without defect; it was a valuable asset, and you offered it to God. You couldn't offer God the leftovers. The burnt offering was to be totally burnt, which represented complete devotion to God. That's what is pictured here.

In view of God's mercies, offer your whole body to God. Notice a few things about this.

Notice it's a living sacrifice, not a dead one. It's not a dead animal, but our bodies as a living sacrifice.

Notice also it's our body, not our heart. I'd have expected him to command me to offer my heart to God. Why would God want my body? As I get older, my body gets harder and harder to live with, much less look at! Why would God want this body? This would have also surprised Paul's Greco-Roman readers because they believed the body was negative and bad; to be truly spiritual, you had to cultivate the soul. But God doesn't want a purely inward and abstract offering; he wants our bodies. You see, sin manifests itself through our bodies. In Romans 3, Paul wrote of tongues that practice deceit, lips that spread poison, mouths full of cursing, and feet swift to shed blood. That's why in Romans 6, we're told to offer the members of our body as "instruments of righteousness to God." We're bodily creatures, and worship is to be expressed not in some kind of ethereal way, but in our physicality.

Notice also it's an acceptable sacrifice, not unacceptable. Just like the burnt offering was to be holy and without blemish, we're to be "holy and pleasing to God." He's not saying you have to clean yourself up before you come to God. You're holy and pleasing to God because Jesus cleansed and washed you from sin.

Finally, notice it's a reasonable sacrifice, not an unreasonable one. This is what Paul means when he says this is "our true and proper worship." The Greek word for true and proper means logical or rational. He's saying, in light of God's mercies, it makes total sense to do this. Once you understand God's mercies, anything

less than complete sacrifice of yourself to God makes no sense! This is what worship is all about. Worship isn't just coming to church and singing a few songs that make us feel close to God; it's offering all we are to God, seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day.

God's Word is calling for nothing less than total and complete surrender as a reasonable expression of worship. Notice he urges all the "brothers and sisters" in the church to do this, not just a few sold-out Christians. I was at the gym talking with a friend. He said something about how easy it is to become distracted from God in the midst of life. I said I struggle with that too. He looked at me and said, "You don't struggle with that. You're a pastor. You're totally dedicated to God." I said, "No, I do struggle with it." You see, we sometimes think this is just something for pastors and missionaries. But this is for all of us. This is the normal Christian life. God wants all that we are — our time, our money, our talents, our family, our career, and our hobbies. He wants every part of our life on the altar as an expression of worship.

Soon after I gave my life to Christ, I was brought to Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto. I'd never been inside anything but a Catholic church. Immediately, I noticed words carved into the wood behind the stage: "You are not your own; you are bought with a price." It was a powerful message to a baby Christian — I no longer run my own life. I belong to him. He owns me. It's so appropriate that every worshipper saw that as they came to church because that's the essence of worship. We're not our own.

I try to drive carefully. But when I rent a car, I drive very carefully. Why? Because the car doesn't belong to me. I don't want to damage the property of Hertz or Enterprise and return it to them all banged up, and ultimately, pay the price for that. Even so, our bodies are the personal property of someone else. The only way we could say, "Who does he think he is, telling me what to do with my body?" is by not belonging to him at all. Did he shed his blood for us? If so, then we should worship and glorify him, even in our physicality.

True and proper worship requires an ongoing choice

Now I think all of us would agree — that sounds good, but sometimes life just gets in the way. So how do I do this? How can I approach every day and every situation with this kind of worship in mind? Paul tells us,

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."
v. 2

Notice true and proper worship requires an ongoing choice. There's a negative side to that and a positive side.

The negative side requires a renunciation. He says, "Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world." Literally, this should read, "Stop being squeezed into the world's mold." We tend to think that means we shouldn't do things like smoke, drink, wear certain clothes, or watch R-rated movies. If you're really spiritual, you'll live like the Amish. There are a lot of believers who think like that. But that can be deceiving. In fact, I know people who've given up all of those things, and yet deep down they're still saturated by the spirit of the age. And that's what this word really means. Literally, it's "Stop being conformed to the pattern of this age."

What is the pattern of this age? We must be able to identify it. The pattern of the age is all about self-sovereignty. "I have the right to live my life however I want. I determine what's right and wrong. Whatever works for me is right." The pattern of this age puts me in charge. It says no one has the right to tell me what's right and wrong. I decide that. God's word says, "Don't get sucked into that kind of thinking! It's an approach to life that's distorted, don't be trapped by it."

But how do we do that? This leads to the positive thing: "But be transformed by the renewing of your mind." He's talking about an ongoing, daily renewal of how we think about life. It's only when we do that we'll be transformed. That word transformed comes from the Greek word metamorpho. It means transformation from the inside out, not just outward conformity. That takes place through renewing our mind.

How is our mind renewed? It's renewed through the Word of God and the Spirit of God. In fact, the Word of God is called "the sword of the Spirit." That's one reason why it's important to come to church. When you come here, your mind is renewed. You may or may not learn something new, but you'll be renewed. As we sing, pray, and hear the Scriptures taught, the Spirit of God unmasks the lies the world feeds us, and we're able to see again what's true and real. The Spirit applies God's Word to our hearts, and we see through insidiousness lies of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

I should add that this may very well mean we make hard choices about all those things I mentioned earlier. It may very well impact what we chose to put into our bodies. It may very well impact what kind of movies we see, or how much TV we choose to watch, what we choose to wear, or what we do with our money. Why? Because all of those things are part of offering our bodies to God. Again, our bodies matter!

In June 2017, 33-year-old rock climber, Alex Honnold, scaled El Capitan. That's a 3,000-foot granite rock in Yosemite national park, widely considered the most challenging wall in the world. He was the first person to make the climb "free solo" — with no equipment or ropes — at one point hanging from just his

thumbs 1,000 feet above the ground. He lives most of the year out of a van, a lifestyle known as "dirt-bagging," which he calls "an intentional choice to prioritize your vocation." Honnold said,

"I want to climb in the best places in the world, and that's my focus. So, I'm willing to give up having stability, having a shower, having whatever in order to climb the way that I want." He goes on to say, "I'm probably more intentional with the way I live my life than virtually anybody. I've made clear choices about what I find value in, what risks I'm willing to take. I'm doing exactly what I love to do. It's very easy for someone sitting on the couch at home to condemn it as crazy and stupid. But I can justify all my choices — can you say the same about your life?"

That's a great question. Can you say the same about your life? Shouldn't we be able to do the same thing as those who've been the recipient of God's many mercies? Shouldn't we be even more intentional about the way we live? Let me offer a couple of examples. In his book, *Making Grateful Kids*, Jeffrey Froh writes that an American child who watches three hours of children's television programming a day will see 4,380 good acts in a year but 15,330 acts of violence in that same time. Research indicates abundant exposure to violent programming and video games is not a good thing. In over a hundred studies involving over 130,000 participants, researchers found violent video games increase aggressive thoughts, angry feelings, and aggressive behavior. They also decrease empathy for others. So, wouldn't our daily choice to renew our minds impact what we let our kids watch on TV?

But I don't want to just pick on kids. As adults, we're obsessed with our phones. For example, the research company, dscout, recruited 94 Android device users and installed software that tracked each user's interaction over five days — every tap, type, swipe, and click. They're called "touches." The researchers found the top 10% touch their phone 5,427 times a day. That's a lot. But the rest of us still touch them 2,617 times a day on average. That means the heaviest users touch their devices a couple of million times in one year! Now smartphones aren't bad, but that impacts how we relate to people, and how we relate to God. I wonder, is it possible for us to offer our bodies to God as a living sacrifice while we're turning to our phones over 2,500 times a day?

True and proper worship results in approving what God's will is

There's one more thing to see about true and proper worship. It results in us being able to test and approve God's "good, pleasing and perfect will." The Greek word for "test and approve," was used to describe the process of examining gold ore to determine if it was genuine or not. In its positive sense, it means to put something to the test in order to demonstrate that it is genuine.

It's not about "discovering" God's will as much as it is "proving" or "approving" that God's will is good, pleasing and perfect.

John Piper said,

"Our spiritual worship is to come to God each day and say: 'O God, there's nothing that I want more than to approve what's most worthy, and value what's most valuable, and treasure what's most precious, and admire what's most beautiful, and hate what's most evil, and abhor what's most ugly. I reckon myself dead to all that's unspiritual and worldly and deadening to my soul. Renew me, O my God. Awaken spiritual capacities of right assessment.'"

Everyone asks, "What is God's will for my life." Well, you can't begin to approve God's will unless you refuse to be conformed to the pattern of this age and let your mind be constantly renewed by God's truth. If you don't do that, you'll be duped by the world's way of thinking and miss out on God's will. Often, we focus on the "will of God" as if it were something we discover in a secret compartment, hidden away by God, separated from the rest of our lives. So, we search and worry and fret about how to find it. But it's a mistake to think of God's will as if it's separated from our worship. Knowing God's will is just a subset of offering ourselves up to God in worship every day. Knowing God's will goes far beyond questions such as, "Should I get married?" "Where should I go to college?" "Should I buy a new house?" "Should I move to Denver or Portland?" Those questions are secondary when it comes to the will of God. And yet we tend to spend our days obsessing about those issues.

I love how he says God's will is good, pleasing and perfect. Who wouldn't want that? God's will is good. That means doing things God's way will always prove to be for our ultimate benefit. God's will is pleasing. It's pleasing to God, but also to us personally. It may not always be easy, but in the end, it will be pleasing. God's will is perfect. The word means something that's complete or whole, something that's reached its intended destination. If you live for God, you'll come to the end of your life satisfied. If you live for the world, you'll have the world's reward, which will satisfy you for only a short time.

C.S. Lewis wrote,

"There are two kinds of people: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, 'All right, then, have it your way.'"

Which is better? Which do you want? If God's will is good, pleasing and perfect, I want that, don't you?

So what is true and proper worship? It's offering all that we are to God, in all of our life, because of his many mercies. And how can we do that? By rejecting the world's way of thinking, and letting our minds be renewed every day in the truth of God's word.

In a worship service one Sunday morning the offering plate came to a little girl at the end of a row. She took the plate, put it down on the floor, and stood in it. When the usher asked what she was doing, she said, "In Sunday School, I learned I was supposed to give myself to God." She's so right.

In view of God's mercies, what can we offer to God that will please him more than anything else? Offer in worship the totality of yourself, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.