

Basics

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2 ESV)

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Cor.10:31 ESV)

What Is Worship?

September 27th, 2015

Romans 12:1-2

1 Corinthians 14:26-40

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Introduction:

Good morning church! We are going to continue our series on the “Basics” this morning, and we are going to tackle a topic that is fundamental to the Christian life. Today, we will ask the question, “What is Worship?” Worship is an enormous topic, and the term “worship” is used to express a variety of things within the Christian life. If you’ve been around the church for a while you’ve probably heard it said that everything we do in life is a form of worship. And that’s true, isn’t it? In fact, in 1 Corinthians 10:31 the Apostle Paul says, “So, whether you eat or drink, or *whatever you do*, do all to the glory of God.” So the meaning of worship is not just crammed into a neat little box, but instead it is all encompassing in our lives! Aha! So worship is everything I do! Sermon over!

But isn’t there something unique about our gathering? We call this a “worship service” right? But we don’t just do whatever we feel like doing in these services. They seem to be pretty consistent with the singing, the preaching, the praying and the communion. So *this* is worship, but worship *is also* everything we do. Worship *is* a personal, whole-life response to God, but we’re also called to worship by gathering together in Jesus’ name. As we deal with the question, “What Is Worship” we’re going to keep both our personal and our corporate worship in mind.

What is worship? That's a big question. This morning, we'll break that question down into two separate questions. We're going to ask, "Why do we worship?" and we're going to ask, "How should we worship?"

So, let's begin. Turn with me in your Bibles to Romans 12:1-2. If you think back to our "What Is The Gospel?" sermon, you will remember that we chose to root ourselves in Paul's letter to the Romans. We did this because the book of Romans is robust and clear in its definition of the gospel. You've probably seen this diagram before. (The 5 G's diagram to be up on the screen) So, in the book of Romans, the Apostle Paul explains that there is a God who created us, to whom we owe our obedience, our love and our worship. He goes on to explain that we have all sinned against this God. All of us. We are guilty. We have sought to go our own way and have rejected His way. "There are none righteous, no not one" and "the wages of sin is death". Now, that's the bad news. But thanks be to God, Paul doesn't end Romans there! He goes on to explain the grace of God. He explains how God did for us what we could never do for ourselves. God came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ. He became a man, and He obeyed the law of God completely. Then the sinless Jesus Christ died on the cross. He paid the price for sin, but He had no sin to pay for. He paid for our sin – for the sin of anyone who repents and puts his or her trust in Jesus Christ. Three days later, He rose again and He showed us that death has no power over Jesus or anyone who belongs to Him. He ascended to the Father, and He is seated at His throne reigning over everything. These are the first three G's of the gospel, but our text today is entirely dealing with G4. So we will be camping right here today. Worship is entirely an expression of our gratitude.

In Romans 12:1-2, the Apostle Paul has finished explaining the first three G's and he then urges the reader,

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Informed by this text, let's tackle this first question.

Question 1: Why Do We Worship?

We worship because we have seen and understood what God has done in Christ to secure our salvation. We see that in this text. Worship is our personal, whole-life response to the grace of God. Paul has been explaining to the Romans the holiness of God, the depth of our sin and the grace of what God has done in Christ. Then he says this, “In light of all of this, understanding all of this, *therefore*, let us present our bodies as a sacrifice to God.” John Calvin notes, “this exhortation teaches us, that until men really apprehend how much they owe to the mercy of God, they will never with a right feeling worship him, nor be effectually stimulated to fear and obey him.”¹

Worship flows naturally from gratitude. Worship flows naturally from understanding the gospel. So church, how is your worship? Are you feeling dry, cold or apathetic in your walk with God? If that’s the case – if you are feeling a “worship problem” in your spirit – this text suggests that you’re really experiencing a gospel problem. In those dry seasons, we might be inclined to think that we just need to pull ourselves up by the bootstraps. Maybe if we play the music a little louder, or if we play some heavenly sounds on the keyboard we will be stirred again. We tell ourselves that if we just act better, if we just work harder, than everything will fall into place. However, what we really need is to *believe* better. What we really need is to *remember* better.

Let me give you an example. Worship, or gratitude as Paul describes it here in Romans, is supposed to look a lot like a five year old opening a Christmas present. There is an action, but that action – that response – ought to flow so naturally from our gratitude that we barely notice it happening. Our kids don’t *will* themselves to smile as they rip open their gifts. We don’t have to negotiate with them. “Now Timmy, I have a gift for you here and *if you feel like it* you can just go ahead and rip that wrapping paper off. There’s a brand new toy in there and *maybe, if you’re up to it (I don’t want to pressure you)*, you could play with it (*only if you want to!*). That’s not how it works! They don’t need our prompting. They naturally tear into that wrapping paper and rip open that box! And when that box is opened up they smile! If they were able to open their gift without a smile, it would say something about the gift we gave them, wouldn’t it? Their response to our gift really says something about the gift itself. I’m not a “child expert” but I know that a homemade sweater gets a very different response than a lightsaber.

¹ John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries (Complete)* (trans. John King; Accordance electronic ed. Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), n.p.

In the same way, Paul is urging the church to reflect on the gift of grace that God has given us. If you are able to reflect on the grace of God in Jesus Christ without responding by surrendering your life to Him, than what are you saying about the gospel? When Christians are cheap - when Christians are miserable – when they come to church week after week with no joy, no transformation and no response; that speaks volumes about how we understand the gospel. When we live like that, what we’re really saying is, “I’ve opened the gift, and it’s not very good.” God, forgive us for every time our lives say *that* to the world.

Now, I want to clarify something this morning because I recognize that even in this gathering there are likely a number of people who are feeling dry, defeated and spiritually asleep. Am I saying that you are not saved? No! Even if you have placed real, saving faith in Jesus Christ there will be seasons in your life when you feel like you’re in the valley. We leak. The beauty of the gospel slips through the cracks in our hearts and we realize that we don’t cherish it the way we once did. When our appreciation of the gospel leaks, our worship suffers. Church, this is why we sing, and pray, and preach the gospel week after week. All of us need to hear the gospel and to see it afresh because all of us are prone to wander. Every Christian would be wise to start their day with this simple prayer, “Lord help me to see afresh and to appreciate the gospel today.” When we see it rightly, it changes everything. Why do we worship? **We worship because we have seen and understood what God has done in Christ to secure our salvation.** But this leads us to our second question: How should we worship?

Question 2: How Should We Worship?

In this passage, Paul has called us to offer our bodies as “living sacrifices”. We want to understand what this means, and so hear how Leon Morris – a great biblical scholar – describes this.

“The appeal is that the readers *offer* their *bodies* as *sacrifices*, a suggestion whose force would be more obvious to Paul’s first readers than to most modern readers. First-century people were familiar with the offering of sacrifices whereas we are not. They had stood by their altar and watched as an animal was identified as their own, as it was slain in the ritual manner, its blood manipulated, and the whole or part of the victim burned on the altar and ascended in the flames to the deity they worshipped. To suggest that they themselves should be sacrifices was a striking piece of imagery.”²

² Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (PNTC; Accordance electronic ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), n.p.

So what are we called to offer to God? We're called to offer ourselves. It's as if Paul says, "God doesn't want you to place the bulls or the lambs on the altar. He wants you to place yourself there." What does this mean? If you're new today maybe it feels like we're beginning to talk about human sacrifice... You're looking back over your shoulder wondering if the ushers are about to pass around some kool-aid. No, I promise you have nothing to be afraid of this morning. You see, Paul provides three helpful descriptions about this sacrifice that we are to offer. This sacrifice is living, holy, and pleasing to God. What Paul is asking for is actually very common in the New Testament. As Christians, we are called to die to who we once were. We die to our former sins and our former self-serving way of life. But as we die to our old selves we experience new life in Christ. Our old desires pass away and now we live lives that are increasingly holy and pleasing to God. John Calvin says of this sacrifice, "for it hence follows, that we must cease to live to ourselves, in order that we may devote all the actions of our life to his service."³ So this is our first answer to the question, "How should we worship?"

1. We Should Worship Whole-heartedly

In view of God's mercy, every true Christian is called to die to their former way of life and to live a new life that seeks to glorify and please God. We say "whole-heartedly" here because that is the kind of sacrifice that Paul is calling for in this text. The attitude of the Christian should be like this: Seeing and understanding the grace of God in Jesus Christ, I want to offer my whole heart in His service. My working, my thinking, my spending, my speaking... I want every part of me to be set apart for the glory of God. That is how each of us is called to worship. That is our personal response

However, we mentioned earlier that worship does not end with our personal responses. If it did, we would be right to spend our Sunday mornings sleeping in, doing yard work and listening to online sermons. Worship *is* a personal, whole-hearted response, but God's word instructs us that it is so much more than that. We are told to gather together. You see, true Christian worship

³ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries (Complete)* (trans. John King; Accordance electronic ed. Edinburg: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), n.p.

results in a desire to gather with God's people to proclaim His greatness and to encourage fellow believers. We've spoken about personal worship, but now we need to see that Christian worship should also be corporate. We see this throughout all of scripture. Bob Kauflin is a well-respected scholar and he notes, "While God expected individual and family devotion to him, the Israelite year was marked by annual festivals where God's people gathered to celebrate his goodness and renew his covenant with them."⁴ God's people have always been a gathering people. So how should we go about structuring this gathering?

Turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 14:26-40. For the rest of this morning's sermon, we are going to be rooted in this text. The church in Corinth had some serious issues in the area of corporate worship. This is good news for us because, in addressing the issues in Corinth, the Apostle Paul provides great clarity for us as to how we should conduct ourselves when we come together. Some of the issues they dealt with seem foreign to us, and some of their issues look strikingly familiar. Ultimately, at the root of their issues we see a misunderstanding about what the gathering of God's people is all about.

This is a challenging text with a number of potential bunny trails. Thankfully, we just finished a series on 1 Corinthians so should you find yourself objecting in your mind, "Hey! Why isn't he saying more about that!" it's because it's already been said. Pastor Paul has already dealt with these texts in great length and I would encourage you to go to our website and to download the sermons preached on chapters 11 – 14. There you'll find a comprehensive handling of any questions that might arise today. This morning, we want to get at the heart of what the Apostle Paul is saying about corporate worship. All of what Paul says here is import, but we want to highlight the thesis of his argument. There are some foundational values about the gathering of believers in this text and I'd like for us to see them this morning.

So, thinking of the corporate gathering now, and informed by this text we ask: How do Christians worship?

2. We Should Worship Regularly

Notice what he says in verse 26. "*When* you come together". Now, I don't want to read too much into this one word, but Paul does not say, "*If* you come together" or "*should you happen* to come

⁴ Bob Kauflin, *True Worshipers: Seeking What Matters to God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2015), 72.

together”. No, Paul speaks in a way that assumes that the people of God will gather. I don’t believe this reading is a stretch because we see in Hebrews 10:24-25 this admonishment for the church: “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, *not neglecting to meet together*, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

How often should we gather together? We don’t have a clear answer, however, we know that the Jews were gathering once a week on Saturday at the synagogue. We know that Christians would then gather together again on Sunday (which, by the way, is why *we* gather on Sundays). We also see in Acts chapter 2 that they seemed to meet and break bread together every day of the week. So, how often should we gather? I’m not comfortable suggesting that we *must* meet every day, nor am I comfortable suggesting that we should *only* meet once a week. However, we can certainly say that any one who spends more than a week isolated away from Christian community is missing out on what God has in mind for believers. We need each other, and we need to gather together regularly.

We also see in this text that we should worship communally.

3. Communally

See this in verse 26. “When you come together, *each one* has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation.” The corporate worship gathering is not a theatre where Christians gather to spectate. Canadians are naturally inclined to be spectators. Unless we’re at a hockey game, we are typically a people that like to sit back and enjoy the show. We are tempted to approach church the same way we approach going to the cinema. We sit back and we ask, “What do you have for me today?”

But this is not what we see in Paul’s instructions to the Corinthians. We see a gathering where *each one* contributes. Now, what does that look like? We contribute in our singing, in our praying, in the sharing of testimonies or words of prophecy or encouragements from God’s word, even in the raising of our hands or the expressions on our faces. Each of us brings something to this gathering. We are not spectators.

Now, when we come here and we bring our gifts together it’s not a free for all. Paul’s next point that we’ll see in the text is that we should worship decently.

4. We Should Worship Decently

Our text this morning serves as a conclusion and summary of sorts for the larger section on corporate worship that begins in 10:23. In chapter 11 he dealt with gender issues. This has the potential to be a bunny trail, and please see our previous sermons for an extended treatment of this, but here is a very quick summary. In the Corinthian culture, women wore head coverings as a sign of submission to their husbands. The women in the church had decided that they needed no such sign, so they were casting off their head coverings and gathering in corporate worship without them. Unfortunately, the culture didn't understand this statement. As an outsider, it appeared as if these Christian women were rejecting their identity as women. Paul essentially said to these women, "This isn't the place to be making bold, culture shaking statements about gender." While their hearts may or may not have been in the right place, their actions were only serving to distract and confuse the world around them. They were drawing attention away from the very thing that people were gathered to hear and to see.

Later in chapter 11, Paul rebuked the church for the way that they practiced communion. They were favoring the rich and neglecting the poor. The rich would partake of the Lord's Supper together with a great abundance and the poor would gather separately with very little. The very thing that was supposed to unite the church was dividing it. Then, in chapter 12, Paul introduced his teaching on spiritual gifts. There are a great number of spiritual gifts in the church, ranging from speaking words of wisdom to hosting people with hospitality. All of these gifts should serve to strengthen and build up the church. But in chapter 14 Paul describes how people in the church were speaking out in foreign tongues in the congregation with no one to interpret. He goes on to describe how people were shouting over one another at times so that no one could understand what was being said. The very gifts that were given to build up the church were instead being used to impress others and to draw attention to the person with the gift.

So Paul rebuked and corrected all of these errors. Our gathered worship is not the place to be making culture-shocking statements about gender. It's not the place for you to flaunt your gifts to draw attention to yourself. When we take communion together, that's not a place for you to make divisions between social classes. All of those things distract from why we've gathered in the first place. So he concludes in 14:40 with this instruction, "Let all things be done decently and in order." This leads into Paul's final two points about how we are to worship, and these final two points really form our top two priorities in regards to corporate worship. How do we worship?

5. We Should Worship In a Way That Edifies Other Believers

Look at chapter 14, at the second half of verse 26. Pauls says,

Let all things be done for building up. If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets.

Here Paul puts forth a guiding principle for the Christian gathering. It is to be edifying. In other words, it needs to teach, build up and equip the church. He observes that, if someone speaks out in a foreign tongue but there is no one to translate, than the congregation wont be instructed. It will only serve to confuse them. If one person is sharing a word from the Lord but is then interrupted by two or three others all sharing a word at the same time, than no one will understand anything that is being shared. Paul puts some fundamental rules in place here: If what you have to share does not edify the church – if it is not understandable or if it is done in such a way that it only serves to confuse and distract others – than don't bring it to the gathering. We gather for a purpose. These strange distortions that arose in Paul's day will arise in our day if lose sight of the purpose of this gathering. If we believe that this meeting is only about each individual having a private encounter with God than we will give ourselves certain liberties that Paul forbids here.

The purpose of our gathering is not only to glorify God, but it is also to edify and encourage the body. We read about this earlier in Hebrews. “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” The gathering is for God, but by His grace He has made it so that this gathering would also be about us. We receive from God, and we receive from one another and for this reason, we are committed to protecting this gathering from anything that would distract, distort or confuse the clear message of the gospel. The songs we sing, the sermons we preach, the prayers we pray and the way that we all participate week after week in this gathering are all subject to this guiding principle: Does this contribution build up the church? If it doesn't, than that doesn't mean it is inherently bad or useless, but it does mean that that particular contribution does not belong in our corporate worship service.

Lastly, we should worship in a way that glorifies God.

6. We Should Worship In a Way That Glorifies God

As it is with our personal lives, so it is with our gatherings. The ultimate purpose of this corporate time of worship is to glorify God. Chapter 14 verse 33 states, “For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.” You see, what we do and say as we gather together in this place ought to reflect and display the nature of God. We celebrate and proclaim who He is! We model our meetings after what we see prescribed for us in His word. Even our demographics display something of who God is. We gather here with people of different nationalities, genders, income brackets, age demographics and social circles because God has come to save sinners from every tribe, tongue and nation. We sing songs that glorify God written by English men who have been dead for over a hundred years and we sing songs written by a 25-year-old woman in Chicago. We try to display unity in our diversity because this gathering should say something to the world about who God is. We preach long sermons because, in a meeting focused on God, we ought to spend a great deal of time listening to what He has to say. We sing gospel-rich songs about the character of God because we believe that there is something powerful about God’s people declaring His nature and His greatness in song. The Christian gathering is a glimpse, even a taste of the glorious end of the gospel. Listen to this description from Revelation.

⁹ After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (Revelation 7:9–10 ESV)

This should be a reflection of that. Obviously, this will only be a dim shadow at best, but it should clearly point towards that day. This is why we gather – because we were made to. This is why we worship – because we see Him and what He has done and we can’t hold ourselves back from proclaiming His greatness. This is how we worship – in a way that builds up Christ’s church and brings glory to God.

Application

Now, I'd like to briefly put forward two applications for us as a church. First of all, I'd like to point back to the communal nature of the church that we see in scripture. During our 1 Corinthians series, we came across some texts that challenged us to look at how we structure our corporate worship gatherings. One such text was 1 Corinthians 14:26-40. This text challenged us to consider whether we had allowed any room in our services for a spontaneous word of prophecy that God might give to a member of our congregation. To be clear, we believe from this same text that a service should be structured and that everything ought to be done in order. We believe that, through prayerful and thoughtful preparation, the Holy Spirit can and does guide our service preparation as it is done midweek. However, we see that "each one" appears to bring something to the gathering, and we worry that our gatherings have lost that element.

Having studied the Scriptures and having been confronted with an element of worship that we have been neglecting, we have prayerfully decided to explore a means of incorporating more of the spontaneous into our services. We will have a pastor at the back of the sanctuary in front of Guest Central. At any point before the sermon, a member who feels led to share a testimony, a scripture, or a prophecy can proceed to the back to share that word with the pastor. He will then have the opportunity to prayerfully discern whether the word is edifying and appropriate. We believe this to be in line with verse 29 of chapter 14 where it notes that "the others" should weigh what is said. If the pastor so determines he will signal the worship leader, and there will be a brief pause in the scheduled service for this person to come forward and share what God has impressed upon his or her heart.

We suspect that this will feel "clunky" for a while. It may take a few weeks to find our rhythm. However, we firmly believe that there is blessing in obedience, and that we must always be willing to reform our practices in light of what we see in God's Word. This will feel new to us – but there is precedent for it in church history and more importantly, in the pages of Holy Scripture.

Finally, serving as one of the worship leaders here, I have a unique perspective. One thing I've observed about this church is that we sing with ten times the volume and ten times the passion after the sermon is preached. Rightly or wrongly, if our participation level is at 40% before the sermon, it spikes to 90% after the sermon. This makes sense because our worship is a response, and we see God clearly as we humbly sit and listen to His word preached. At the same time, it saddens me that the time in the service when we are most ready to respond in praise is the time when we are preparing to head out the door. Is there any way around this? I don't know church.

What if we all made a concerted effort to wake up a little earlier on Sunday morning to pray and to seek God in His word before gathering together. Maybe we would be more prepared to respond. Or maybe we could structure the service in such a way that we hear from God's word sooner so that we have more time to respond with hearts that are informed and seeing the gospel afresh. I don't have the answer, but if our worship really does say something about God – if our corporate response says something to the world about the gospel – than I want to explore every avenue. I so desperately want to see us more and more become a people who are known for our passionate response. I want people to see that. I want people to know about that. I want to proclaim that the deeper we dig into God's word, the more joyful our response will become. To that end, let's pray together.