

What Initiates Our Worship or The Presentation of Worship

Romans 12:1,2 *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”*



What sweet verses? Paul doesn't speak above us but among us as a brother. He doesn't shout a command but instead gives us an entreaty... an earnest encouragement. He is calling us to worship God. He gives us the reason for that worship. He gives us the presentations of that worship. And he tells us the reasonableness of that worship.

1. Preview ... God is searching for Worshipers
2. Prelude... We can Worship anytime, anywhere,
3. Prerequisite... We have an Alter for Worship
4. Priority... We must know God to Worship
5. The Purpose... Worship is for God's pleasure alone.

Worship is wholly for God. It is not an act of self-interest. It equates to the burnt offerings ordained in Leviticus. The burnt offering was burned entirely. Nothing remained of it for the priest to eat or for the one who brought it. It was the only offering which promised no certain outcome and sought no certain outcome. Not forgiveness of general sinfulness like the sin offering; or forgiveness of a specific sin like the trespass offering; not a presentation for the dedication and blessing of the harvest like the grain offering; not a presentation to celebrate and seek fellowship with God like the peace offering. No, the burnt offering was given as a sweet-smelling savor to God alone. And there the people were being taught that the essence of worship is to live for the pleasure of God.

We gave last week as our illustration of this kind of purposed worship the story in Genesis 22 of Abraham being called of God to offer up Isaac as a burnt offering to Him. God calls Abraham and Abraham says ... *“Here I am.”* God says, *“Abraham make of your son, the one you love, a burnt offering for Me.”* Can you imagine? Abraham would be seized with appropriate questions to such a request. *“God what will I get out of this. Is there some forgiveness I'll receive, some peace, some promised blessing other than what you already have given me?”* *“No Abraham. This is a burnt offering. This is completely for me. For my sake.”*

This is an act that seeks not an outcome for ourselves. It is in this sense truly sacrificial on our parts. Abraham must have offered up a number of burnt offerings to God. Each time he was symbolically saying. *All I have is yours. I wish to be all yours in worship. I want my life to be only motivated to please you not satisfy me or secure benefit for me.* But now there is no more symbols of worship, now a reality. *Set aside the bull, the ram, the goat... Now take your Son, the one you love, the one your future hopes rest upon, the one who represents my blessing upon you... bring all that to me and give it wholly to me.* This will be Abraham's signal expression of faith in worship.

"We are not called upon to give up one taste out of many; one pursuit out of many; one wish out of many; we are distinctly called upon to give up everything – to sink our will into God's." This is worship.

Now the question is what would cause us to worship God for His pleasure alone? What is the effecting cause of our worship? Remember worship is cleansed creatures ascribing and adoring the worthiness of God. There is the possibility of Awe – which we have said is fear standing at a safe distance from greatness – Awe leading us into worship. But what is it that transfers awe into adoration and an adoration for the pleasure of the one adored?

With all God's attributes, we may ascribe a worth which would lead us to fall before Him in adoring worship, but there is one effecting attribute of God that ignites that worship. Not all attributes initiate us as worshippers. In fact only one does.

1. Examples of attributes of God that do not initiate our worship of Him:

Holiness: Holiness is the face of God in its shining power – His holiness; His utter otherness. It is the Holiness of God that causes the eruption of worship and awe from the lips of the Angels before His throne. **Isaiah 6** tells us that they cannot help but cry out day and night, *"Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God almighty."* These angels free from the fear of sin; they are clean themselves and in that holy state they worship at the expression of God's holiness. Though His holiness is so concentratedly powerful that it overpowers them, it doesn't drive them from His presence, and they may untiringly glory in the revelation of God as Holy.

But that is not the response of Isaiah. At the sounding forth of God's holiness by the lips of this angels, he cries out, not in adoration, but consternation and concern, *"Woe is me for I am undone. For I am a man of unclean lips and dwell among a people of unclean lips."* His words are not address to God but at God. It is much like to words of Peter when he fell at Jesus feet and said, *"Depart from me Lord for I am a sinful man."* God's holiness all by itself leaves us uncomfortable and unmasked as lacking, utterly lacking for the encounter. It leaves us covering our faces, fainting as though we were dead, on our faces, seeking to become one with the soil. The holiness of God all by itself would

drive us down and drive out from Him, aware of His perfections and our complete imperfections and sins.

Consider God’s justice and wrath against sin: Will the awareness of His just judgment against our sins bring us to worship? The answer is certainly not. If all we have before us is the justice of God and the wrath of God against our imperfect and sinful selves, then we are like Satan – Condemned with nothing left for ourselves but a season of rebellion before God’s final blow. We have no words of worship to give to God, instead we would only cry out our defiance to the end.

With the inevitability of God’s just wrath against our sins... if that is all that we have to look forward to... then we would only pour ourselves into our selfish rule until the day of His final judgment brought us to our end and then on that day we would not go quietly to Him as our executioner but we might reasonably cry out the words found in **Revelation 6:15-16** ¹⁵ *And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains,* ¹⁶ *and said to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!”* ¹⁷ *For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”* These are not words of adoration. This is not a proclamation of worship.

Holiness doesn’t initiate our worship nor wrath against sin though we may worship God for these attributes in action. So, what initiates our worship of God? – Our ascribing and adoring of His worthiness for His pleasure alone?

2. Consider that attribute that alone initiates that worship which is for God’s pleasure alone?

It is God’s mercy that produces our worship. God’s mercy is the reason for worship.

The book of Romans begins with a problem. A problem that should alert all people to find a solution. It is stated in **Romans 1:18**, *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness...* If you think you can escape the net of God’s wrath as stated by Paul, Paul will go on to draw all of us up into God’s judgment. In **Romans 3:23** says clearly *“All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”* Some will think *yes but if I follow some golden rule, some law or principle of conduct I may yet be suited to come before a holy, sin hating God.* But Paul also says in **Romans 3:19-20** *Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.*

There is no way we may approach this holy, sin hating God by our own efforts or works. This is the problem clearly made plain at the beginning of Paul’s letter. But

Paul's letter is written to reveal God's answer to that problem. It is the whole point of Paul's letter up to this very point in **Romans 12 verse 1**. God's wrath is against all manner of sin. All have sinned. All are guilty. All are under that holy wrath of God. But God has opened up a way to righteousness for those who would place their faith in Christ. There is for that person a righteousness that comes by faith alone. **Romans 3:21-26** gives us the heart of the argument... There you will see that the Lord Jesus in the giving His life; the shedding of His blood in our place has been the one who has satisfied God's justice. He redeems us from the penalty of breaking God's holy laws. He turns aside God's wrath from those who believe in Him by bearing that wrath Himself as a propitiation. He then offers to us sinners His righteousness freely as a gift if we believe in Him. *But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²² even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, ²⁶ to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.* The consideration of the ramifications of this righteousness provided to us by God in answer for our sins is the heart of the book of Romans. In **Romans 3 and 4** you have the consideration of that mercy of God that provides for us through Christ's death and resurrection a Justification that comes by faith. In **Romans 5** you have a consideration of the Peace with God that is ours and the reconciliation with God that is ours by that faith that places us in Christ. In **Romans 6-8** we have the thread of this mercy expanding to incorporate a life set free from sin. It is the message of sanctification through the death of our old nature with Christ and the granting of a new nature in Christ. **Romans 9-11** celebrates the mercy of God in the sovereign orchestrations of Salvation being brought to us. Here is the sovereign mercy of God. And in concluding this Paul breaks out in an anthem of worship at the end of **chapter 11**. **Roman 11:33-36** *Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! ³⁴ "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?" ³⁵ "Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?" ³⁶ For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.* Now in our passages drawn from this story of God's mercy to us Paul entreats us to worship too.

But remember that without our receiving this gift of mercy described and argued throughout the book of Romans there is only the prospect of justice and judgment from God. **Hebrews 10:26, 27** also explains what is left for a person who rejects the cross of Christ and the gift of rightness/salvation offered to us there... *"For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but (only) a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the*

adversaries.” Without faith in Christ and His dying in your place for the punishment of our sins and rising for your forgiveness there is nothing finally to look forward to but the certainty of burning, angry, devouring judgment from God. Let me suggest to you that this will not bring you to worship.

But if you were led to escape from that certain judgment... to escape by the free gift of God... to escape by His own act of intervening and bearing your punishment in your place... **THIS IS CALLED THE MERCY OF GOD...** the unfolding of God’s mercy before God’s holiness and justice will lead to worship.

Why would you give all for the pleasure of God alone in worship? Because a merciful God gave all for you so that you might give all for His pleasure. Nothing more, reasonably, remains for us but to worship Him.

3. How then do we worship? What is worship’s presentation that pleases God?

The Jews would come to the door of the tabernacle and slay the offering. It’s blood would be collected and sprinkled on the sides of the altar. Then the body of the animal would be presented to God on that altar. In essence they were saying, *God take its death in the place of my death. Let me thus approach you and be accepted.* But for the believer, Christ stands as the One in our place and we don’t need to bring to God something as an expression of a hope that He will provide for us a way of forgiveness. We have God’s forgiveness in Christ and His death on our behalf. **Hebrews 10:18** *“Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.”* I have nothing to offer God in seeking forgiveness from Him. Christ has died for me and there is no dead thing left to give to God in my place. I have forgiveness in Him for He has paid my debt. I don’t bring a dead thing to God now. I bring to Him a living thing. What do I give God, bring to God in worship? What do you bring to God in worship? **You bring to God you. We bring ourselves.** We bring our bodies. The very bodies that are subject to temptation and to sin; we bring them and lay them down before God on the Altar of Jesus Christ. **We surrender them so that every instinct of muscle and mind may act in an impulse of gratitude to God.**

I offer a living sacrifice to God. My old man is dead in Christ and I live now by His power. I bring a living sacrifice. **Galatians 2:20** says, *“I have been crucified with Christ and never the less I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me and the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.”* Living for self is to be done away with. We are to put to death, gladly and with joyful ferocity those desires for sin that remain in our flesh. **Having said that, this worship we speak of is not an act of dying for Christ but of living for Him.** EX. of my father spoke with the man who led him to Christ and initially disciplined him. Dad said, *“I am so full of gratitude that I want to die for Christ.”* The man answered him wisely, I think. *“Dying is easy. Your duty is much more difficult. You must live for Him.”* **But this is the reasonable enslavement of**

love offered to the One who rescued us from eternal ruin. It is us seeking no outcome in worship because there is no greater outcome can awaits us. We have all that we might hope for in through the mercy of Jesus Christ. We have been forgiven and reconciled and restored into God's goodness. That outcome has been realized. With Christ we have been granted a position in God's mercy as heirs of all things and possessors of Him and with Him eternal life. There is nothing less to seek from God's hand. There is only living for His pleasure remaining. What is left is worship.

The Lord Jesus said in **Luke 12:32**, *"it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."* I may live always for His pleasure because it was His good pleasure to give me, through His mercy, the Kingdom. I may give all I have for I have nothing to lose and every gain of glory is already mine in Christ. Bengel says, *"He who is rightly affected by the mercy of God, enters into the whole will of God."* We sing, *"Love so amazing, so divine demands my soul, my life, my all."*

Worship is the fragrance of your life poured out at the Savior's nail pierced feet for joy of knowing those feet were pierced for you.

Application: Paul says this is our reasonable worship. That is to say that the mercy of God in Jesus Christ makes the worship of all we are given to His pleasure the obvious thing to do.

- People must know of God's holiness and justice and wrath against sin but we cannot expect from this knowledge that people will be inclined to worship God or even to love Him.
- Love for God and worship of God flows from those who have found the mercy of God. To lead people to worship we must tell them of that there is an ocean of mercy opened up for their sins in the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- You cannot worship God and will not worship God if you think you can give to God anything that He has not already mercifully given to you. Worship begins and ends in the joy of mercy.
- The gospel is therefore necessary for worship and worship is the outcome of those who live in the gospel from day to day. If you are struggling worshipping God you have forgotten the gospel and need to preach it once more to yourself.
- Living without regard for the gospel you will offer God worship as a credential for yourself... but by the gospel you will render it as the only fitting thing to give the One who has mercifully given you Himself for your sins.