

WORSHIP AS A LIFESTYLE

SERIES: THE NOW OF WORSHIP

By Doug Goins

We began this series on worship with the apostle John in the heavenlies of Revelation 4 and 5. There we were invited to sing five hymns of adoration and praise. We were drawn into worshipping the God of creation and salvation who gives us life out of death through the shed blood of Jesus and makes us one in community, a family, and a royal priesthood. The overriding emphasis in the five hymns is that worship is about God and not about us. He is the objective and subjective focus of our corporate worship, as we adore his character, his being, his saving activity on our behalf.

In the next two messages, I want to explore the twofold meaning of Biblical worship. Out of the rich vocabulary of the Old and New Testament several words are translated "worship," and they cluster around two main categories or meanings.

Worship - to bow down in adoring veneration

The first definition of worship means to bow down, to adore, to lovingly venerate God, both personally and also corporately. It is something that we do in a specific place at a specific time. The Old Testament word *shachah* is from Psalm 95:6,

**"O come, let us *worship* and bow down,
let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!"** [italics added]

The most primitive root of that word, from the Old Testament definition, means a dog licking his master's feet--complete, servile obeisance. The same idea in the New Testament, the Greek word *proskuneo*, means adore. We saw it twice in our study of Revelation 4 and 5, "[the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and *worship* him who lives for ever and ever;" (4:10) [italics added].

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament word combine not only physical posture and expression in worship, but also the words we pray or sing as we interact with the Scriptures. We do this activity solely to honor the Lord. Regardless of whether I worship by myself, or with my family or roommates, in a home fellowship group, a Bible study, a Sunday School class, or an all-church service of worship, we do it to focus on the Lord.

From a human standpoint, it does not seem to have a lot of merit because it is not very productive. It is difficult to accomplish anything when you are flat on your face. Here in the Silicon Valley, for example, with our commitment to efficient activism, a block of time set aside just to worship the Lord has little value because we are so task-oriented. Only a Christian, one who sees through the eyes of faith, can appreciate the eternal value and the absolute spiritual necessity of learning to bow down before our Lord God in adoring veneration.

Worship - to actively serve, work and minister

The second meaning of worship is to actively serve, to work, to minister. It can be a personal expression or we can join with other people corporately to worship. The Old Testament word *abad*, to serve, is found in Joshua 24:15: "And if you be unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve [worship] the LORD." The New Testament word for service, *latreuo*, parallels it. It is

also in the passage we are studying, Romans 12:1: "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."

Both the Old Testament and New Testament vocabulary gives us a more comprehensive understanding of worship. They combine a sense of moral and ethical behavior. This is worship that does something, it is active. It is the picture we see in Isaiah 6 where the prophet worships God on his face in humility. But then God lifts him up, puts him on his feet, and sends him out to speak and serve and minister. These are expressions of worship. This definition affirms that all of life--every thought, every choice, every action--is worship.

These two definitions, adoration and service, hold each other in a creative tension. They reinforce each other. If we are to be Biblical, we cannot have one definition without the other. Without adoring veneration on a regular basis our service becomes empty, barren activity. There is little sense of the eternal perspective in what we do. On the other hand, without the regular choice to live out the moral and ethical implications of worship through a lifestyle of obedience, times of praise and worship become hypocrisy. We have examples of this in the Old Testament as God, through the prophets, acknowledges that Israel's worship services are impeccable. But he says, "their hearts are far from me" (Isaiah 29:13). Because their lifestyles are faithless, it puts the lie to their rich times of singing God's greatness and his glory.

The second definition for worship is found in Romans 11:33-12:2. The apostle Paul's description of worship as a lifestyle flows out of a doxology of adoration and praise and worship. A poetic cry from his heart leads into his loving appeal for focused Christian living:

O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

**"For who has known the mind of the Lord,
or who has been his counselor?"**

**"Or who has given a gift to him
that he might be repaid?"**

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever. Amen.

I appeal to you therefore, brethren, 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 you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

With these two little paragraphs the two definitions of worship join and reinforce each other. This worship poetry of 11:33-36 draws together the great themes we sang with the apostle John in the five hymns of Revelation 4 and 5. Paul affirms in this Romans 11 passage that God is sovereign. He has limitless resources of wisdom and knowledge. His decisions, his saving activity in the world and in our lives, is good and perfect. It is too marvelous for us to put into words. The reality is that we live in complete dependence on him, not only for physical life and health, but for spiritual life as well. He is eternally worthy of our wholehearted "amen." Amen is the yes of worship. It means we agree that it is the way it ought to be. So Paul ends this great hymn with a ringing amen.

Our motivation for a lifestyle of worship

Our lifestyle of worship is lived out every day. It is described in Romans 12:1-2 as a response to this God of tremendous riches. The opening phrase in verse 1 explains that our motivation for a lifestyle of worship is God's merciful love. Paul does not command us to live this way, but rather invites us. He appeals to the common identity that he has with the Roman Christians because they are his brothers and sisters in Christ. Likewise it is an invitation of love to us as we read these words. We are to live in response to God's tender mercies shown toward us. Mercy is for people who cannot save themselves. It is always extended towards helpless people. We do not

serve God out of duty, or fear, or obligation.

The apostle Paul had a clear sense of God's mercy as he looked back over his own life. To his spiritual son, Timothy, Paul wrote about the mercies of God and about his response to that: "The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And I am [present tense] the foremost of sinners; but I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience for an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life" (1 Timothy 1:15,16). Paul says Jesus saved him to be an exhibit of God's patience, and he never forgot his tremendous debt of grace.

I remember my own sense of overwhelming gratitude during my freshman year of college when God got hold of me. I was painfully aware of what a mess my life was, and through tears of relief and a deep sense of gratitude I acknowledged what God had done by his Spirit to claim me and make me his own. Isaac Watts' tremendous hymn, *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*, reflects my own experience and Paul's appeal in the opening phrase of our passage. The last two lines say,

*"Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all." (1)*

Do you have that response to God's saving work in your life? Do you owe him everything because of his sacrificial love toward you?

The nature of our lifestyle of worship

The nature of our lifestyle of worship is described in the second phrase of verse 1. It is to be a sacrificial offering: "I appeal to you, brothers, present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God." There are three important words in the statement. The first word "present," or offer up, is a military word. It means to stand at attention before a superior. We say to God, "You own one hundred percent of me, and you can do whatever you want with my life." The Hebrew word that parallels it in the Old Testament was used in the passage where the young boy Samuel confuses Eli with God's call to him (1 Samuel 3:4). Samuel says, "Here I am," I present myself. Romans 12:1 asks us secondly to present our "bodies," the sum total of everything we are physically, emotionally, intellectually, volitionally, and spiritually. God wants everything about us, the good, the bad, and the ugly. The third word, "sacrifice," can be a confusing word in our modern orientation. We see sacrifice as giving up something that belongs to us at a great personal loss or inconvenience. That is not the Biblical idea of sacrifice. The word of God understands sacrifice as giving back to God what is already his, what he already owns.

In addition, there are three aspects of our sacrificial lifestyle. First of all, we are a "living sacrifice." This emphasizes the expression of the life of Christ, the resurrection life of Jesus Christ that is expressed through our physical life. Because we have been made spiritually alive in Christ, we live out our physical lives differently on that basis. In Galatians 2:20 the apostle Paul writes, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." I live in my physical body with its limitations, but at the same time I express spiritual life because of what Jesus Christ has done on my behalf. On the basis of that reality, Paul makes an appeal to us in Romans 6:13: "Do not yield [present] your members [physical bodies] to sin as instruments of wickedness, but yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from death to life, and your members [all your physical parts] to God as instruments of righteousness." We are to be a living sacrifice.

We are also to be a "holy sacrifice." This simply means that we are dedicated completely for God's ownership. God has claimed us, he owns us, and wants to set us apart for specific purposes. The work of Christ has a radical effect on us. In Colossians 1:21-22, Paul says, "And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he [Jesus] has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you" We present ourselves, but the Lord Jesus is presenting us as well, and he is presenting us holy and blameless and irreproachable before the Lord. Holiness is a radical thing. Although it is certainly difficult while we are in the process, growing in grace is a tremendously exciting process. We are to believe who we are, who God has created

us to be spiritually, and then present all of that to God over and over, day by day, moment by moment.

Finally, Paul says that we are an "acceptable" or pleasing sacrifice. What is pleasing to God is a life which is totally his, a life that is infused with the life of his Son, the Lord Jesus. We are acceptable through the cross of Jesus Christ. We are not perfected yet, but we are in the process. The truth is that we have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ, and although we are not yet perfect it does not make us any less pleasing to the Lord. We are in a wonderful, ongoing process of sanctification, being changed by the Holy Spirit. In Hebrews 13:21 the author writes that the God of peace who brought Jesus back from the dead will "equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in you that which is pleasing in his sight," God calls us to present ourselves to him, but he says "I will take you, I will equip you, I will train you, I will make you totally adequate to live the kind of life I want you to live. I am committed to doing that." He is already at work accomplishing that which is pleasing in his sight. We are acceptable to him right now, and he will continue to work in us as we yield to him on an ongoing basis.

The essence of our lifestyle of worship

The essence of our lifestyle of worship is spiritual reality. Present your bodies, brothers and sisters, "which is your spiritual worship," or your reasonable service. Paul says that living sacrificially for the Lord's sake, for the extension of his kingdom, for the good of other people, is the only reasonable, intelligent, thoughtful way to live. The spiritual worship of presenting our bodies to God as instruments of righteousness means that all of our members are affected physically. Our feet walk consistently in his ways. Our mouths tell the truth, speaking of the life-transforming gospel of Jesus Christ. Our hands perform a variety of tasks in serving people: cooking, cleaning, driving, repairing, typing. Our arms embrace hurting people who are desperate to be loved, for Jesus' sake. Our ears listen to the anguish of hurting people. Our eyes focus on the merciful, loving God who is transforming us, and can impact the lives of people we love. None of this activity is driven by religious duty or concern about religious appearances. Because it is controlled and directed by God's Holy Spirit, we can resonate with the apostle Paul writing to the Colossians when he says that we are to do our work "heartily, as serving the Lord and not men" (3:23).

In summary, Romans 12:1 asks important questions: Do I put my entire self at God's disposal? His loving desire is to control all of my life all of the time. Do I hold back in terms of my physical energy, my material resources, or my time? Am I only presenting a part of myself to him on a consistent basis? In reality, his sacrificial love appeals to us to be sold out to him, and if we hold back on the sacrifice of ourselves, then we are limited in our effectiveness as an instrument of righteousness. That is the point of 1 Corinthians 6:19b-20a: "...you are not your own? For you were bought with a price...." If we claim to be Christians we do not belong to ourselves but to the Lord Jesus. He asks us to give him back what is rightfully his.

The goal of our life of worship

As we continue to verse 2 we answer the question, "What is the goal of living this lifestyle of worship?" The goal is moral and ethical transformation.

Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

J. B. Phillips paraphrases it, "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity." (2) God's plan for us to live as change agents in this world is a good one. We are to live as lights, living worshipfully, sacrificially, for the good of those around us. In the process, God changes us, matures us, and transforms us. He makes us increasingly whole people, people who are morally and ethically integrated.

Challenging the culture of our age

Paul expresses it two different ways in this verse. First, he states it negatively in that we are not to conform to the world, but rather to be a challenge to our culture. Conformity can be likened to gelatin, a liquid that can be solidified into different shapes. It adapts itself to a mold. We are called to recognize the forms or patterns that want to press us, what the Bible calls the "spirit of this age," or, literally, the schemes of this world.

Another passage of scripture that speaks of the world's philosophies that mold us is Psalm 94. Two words in that psalm describing the pressure of the world are wickedness and evildoing. Pride and arrogance driven by self-talking and boasting is central. Competition results in devaluing persons and relationships. Innocent, defenseless people are crushed. Moral and ethical compromise abound. And finally, the psalm speaks of a pattern of condemnation rather than extending grace and lifting people up. That is the pattern of the world at work.

We, as Christians, struggle with this. In subtle ways our self-talk can be affected by the attitude "what do I get out of it?" We must beware of personal pronouns such as my, mine, or me. It may be an indication that personal satisfaction is paramount, that meeting personal needs can be the driving force in decision-making and setting priorities. The good news is that by God's Spirit at work in us we can recognize and resist this way of thinking. We have the power to renounce rivalry, competition, and the need to control and manipulate people.

These are issues to which we can relate. The pressures of the world are tremendous, and ever present. Perhaps physical appearance or how we present ourselves is one of the strongest. Likewise, money and what money buys can drive us in reaching for status. Similarly, academic or professional achievement is a powerful force. The challenge for us in this passage is not to be squeezed into conformity by looking at people or the workplace or our schools or even our church the way everybody else does. We are consciously to resist the world's strategies. We reprogram our thinking.

But Paul also states the challenge positively. We are to allow God to reprogram our thinking and belief systems: "...be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." As we said, we are not to be like gelatin that is molded, but rather we are to be transformed. The visual image would be that of a butterfly that is transformed from a caterpillar. It is the contrast between a slow, plodding creature confined to the ground with that of a being of beauty and grace that flies in freedom. The Greek word for transformed, *metamorphosis*, describes the process of a caterpillar becoming a butterfly; a *metamorphosis* happens, a transformation occurs. In Biblical language, *metamorphosis* always describes an inner change that takes place by the Holy Spirit.

A great understanding of this process of spiritual transformation is in 2 Corinthians 3:17-18: "Now the Lord [Jesus] is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." While conformity to the world results in drivenness, anxiety, compulsiveness, fear and insecurity, the goal of transformation is freedom. The passage continues, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed [transformed] into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."

How does that happen? As our faces are unveiled, we see Jesus clearly. How do we see Jesus clearly? He reveals himself through the word of God, through prayer and deepening intimacy in our relationship to him, and through involvement with other people who are also being transformed. Jesus begins changing our beliefs about ourselves and about the people around us. He changes our emotions, our attitudes, our values, our behavior. Gradually, we realize we are not reflecting the values of the world, but are reflecting God's values.

Paul calls this process the renewal of our minds. Renewal is a powerful word in the Bible, used to describe God's continuing work in the natural world. In terms of our minds, it is used to describe how our own memory of God's personal salvation renews and energizes us. To Titus, a young pastor, Paul writes: "when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:4-7). The renewal of our minds is part of the ongoing process of the continuing work of the Holy Spirit within us, and the result will be that God can use us then to demonstrate his good and perfect will. He

makes us living models of wisdom and thoughtfulness. People look at us and see the Lord Jesus. Thus, the contrast in this verse is stark. It is either conformity to the world, like gelatin, or it is transformation by the Spirit of God, like a butterfly being transformed from a caterpillar.

There are direct implications from Romans 12:1-2 for us today that we cannot ignore. We cannot afford the luxury of being naïve or passive about this antithetical push of the world system. The reality is that there is a war raging over who and what will be the primary influences in our lives, and we must ask the Lord for spiritual discernment to recognize it. But thanks be to God! He has given us the spiritual resources, the ammunition, to win the battle. Martin Luther says that "we have been given the Spirit, the Word, and the Church." We need people to tell us truth, to call us to account when they see us being molded or shaped by the world in our thinking and behavior. We need the word of God telling us truth, reminding us what is real, and putting to the lie the influences that pressure us. And we need the Holy Spirit of God, trusting him to be at work in us, changing us. Then we can be the worshiping servants of God that we are called to be. We can live sacrificially for the good of other people.

I have two examples of this in terms of my own acquaintances. First is my father, who retired from the pastorate this year after forty-nine years of service. He was pondering what to do with his time because he does not want to waste the rest of his life at the age of seventy-nine. My mother told me this week that my father decided to volunteer a few mornings a week at the hospital, just to love the people there by caring and listening. He wants to continue serving and living his life sacrificially. Secondly, I heard about one of our elders who is retired in Oregon. He also wants to serve in retirement, so he is praying for a way he can encourage missionaries around the world by visiting them, loving them, and praying for them. He wants to live his life as a sacrificial offering.

These are spiritual fathers who have earned the right to relax, from a human point of view, but, no, they want to keep serving. That's how I want to grow up, and I hope it's how you want to grow up. Listen to the appeal one more time. Paul says, "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, 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 you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

NOTES

1. Watts, Isaac, *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*. © 1986 Word Music, Waco, TX.
2. Phillips, J.B., *The New Testament in Modern English*. © 1960 Geoffrey Bles Ltd, London, England.
3. Halverson, Richard, *Perspective*. © 1974 Concern, Inc., Washington, D.C. Issue 28:8 dated 2/20/74.

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