

Worshipping God with Our Lives

Romans 12:1-2 on January 7, 2024

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Please read Romans 12:1-2 before going further in this transcript.

Today we're jumping back into our sermon series on the book of Romans. Back in November, we wrapped up the end of Romans 11 by looking at Paul's Gospel Doxology. This doxology of praise was a crescendo to everything that we learned about the gospel in the first 11 chapters. The crescendo at the end of Romans 11 wasn't Paul's ultimate conclusion though; he goes on to write 5 more chapters! Romans 12-16 is a section focused on Christian living: The gospel is "A Gospel for Everyday Living." So it's important for us to recognize that Paul is by no means finished teaching us about the gospel. In fact, he's just getting warmed up. Now that he's laid out his theological overview of God's master plan of salvation, he's going to flesh it out for us with practical examples of how this gospel good news should be lived out.

We worship God with our lives...

I. In grateful response to His gospel mercy toward us.¹ Look how Paul begins Romans 12:1, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to...." Paul highlighted God's mercy right before his Gospel Doxology. In Romans 11:32 Paul concluded, "For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all." All of us have inherited Adam's sin nature, and all of us have sinned and gone astray. In His perfect foreknowledge, God saw what was coming, and He prepared for our redemption through the events of Christmas and Easter. Through Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection, each one of us now has the opportunity to be made right with God. So throughout our exploration of the final 5 chapters of Romans, Romans 12:1 urges us to keep God's mercy in view. In view of God's merciful salvation, how then should we live? In the next several months, we'll answer this question. We'll explore how the gospel ought to be lived out, by those who are "Becoming deeply devoted followers of Jesus together."

We worship God with our lives...

II. Through the reverent obedience of holy living. Romans 12:1 says, "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." This word "offer" is one of our first cues that Paul is

¹ Some Bibles translate verse 1 more literally from the Greek, in the plural, "the MERCIES of God." This reflects the multifaceted aspect of God's mercy. *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2315 footnote on Romans 12:1-2.

referring to worship; “offer” as in offering.² When we offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, we’re offering our entire lives as an act of worship that is holy and pleasing to God.³ ⁴ We actually talked about offering every part of our lives in worship back in Romans 6:13, “Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.”⁵ You see, Romans 12 isn’t the first time that Paul has connected the gospel to Christian living. Paul has already talked about Christian living quite a bit.⁶ I appreciate how my Study Bible says it: “[Chapters 12-16] are not a postscript to the great theological discussions in chapters 1-11. In a real sense the entire letter has been directed toward the goal of showing that God demands our ACTION, as well as our believing and thinking. Faith expresses itself in obedience.”⁷ ⁸

Obedience pleases the LORD! Some Bibles translate verse 1 as “holy and *acceptable*” rather than “holy and *pleasing*.” But even though, at first, pleasing and acceptable may seem like two different things, they’re actually closely related. The Greek word here means both pleasing and acceptable.⁹ ¹⁰ It’s just difficult to find an exact word in the English language that matches this nuance. What Paul is driving at here is that God is pleased with us when our conduct is acceptable. To put it another way, acceptable behavior is one of the primary ways that we can please the Lord; holy living is how we worship the Lord with our lives.¹¹ As we mentioned a couple of months ago, Paul begins and ends his letter to the Roman church with a focus on obedience. Romans 1:5 begins, “Through him [Jesus] we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name’s sake.” Romans 16:26 concludes, “...so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith.” I like how Andrew David Naselli says it, “The gospel is

² Offer = παρίστημι/παριστάνω “@ as a technical term in the language of sacrifice: offer, bring, present.” (William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 778.)

³ “Not just the physical body but the whole person.” *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2315 footnote on Romans 12:1.

⁴ God’s mercy elicits a grateful response of godly living. See *The Reformation Study Bible*, Ligonier Ministries, Sanford, FL, 2015, p. 2002 footnote on Romans 12:1.

⁵ “offer” comes from the same Greek word in Romans 12:1 and 6:13.

⁶ Especially in chapter 6, and in chapter 8, verses 5-13.

⁷ *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1910 footnote on Romans 12:1-15:33.

⁸ Consider James 2:14-26.

⁹ εὐάρεστος means both pleasing and acceptable. William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 403.

¹⁰ εὐάρεστος “pertaining to that which causes someone to be pleased—‘pleasing to, pleasingly.’”

Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 299.

¹¹ Holy living is also part of our witness. See 1 Peter 2:11-12 and 3:1-2; Philippians 2:14-15; Titus 2:1-10; and 1 Peter 3:15-16.

theological AND practical. As the phrase [‘the obedience that comes from faith’] suggests... the gospel transforms how we live.”¹²

Genuine faith in Jesus Christ reveals itself in genuine obedience. The Christian life is not just a façade, and it’s not just a pretend holiness. The Christian life is a Spirit-empowered, God-honoring, Jesus-reflecting life of obedience.¹³ I appreciate how The Message paraphrases Romans 12:1, “...Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering....”¹⁴ The Christian life is a Spirit-empowered, God-honoring, Jesus-reflecting life of obedience. Friend, worshipping God with our lives means so much more than worshipping Him on Sunday morning at church. It means worshipping Him 24/7, every second of every minute of every hour of every day in the year 2024 and beyond! Whether we go skiing or ice fishing, whether we knit or play pickle ball, or whether we go to work or school... whatever we do, we do it all for God’s glory. In all that we do, we’re “Worshipping God with Our Lives.”

The reason we worship God with our lives...

III. Because it’s the only appropriate response to all He’s done for us.

Romans 12:1 says, “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.” At first this word “proper” might make us think that our worship needs to be something formal and “proper,” or that there are only certain “proper” ways to sing and to pray and to worship the Lord. But what this word “proper” is suggesting, is that worshipping God is appropriate. Given the goodness and kindness of God’s mercy, it’s very reasonable for us to respond by worshipping Him with our lives. The *NKJV* captures this idea well: “...present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.” (Romans 12:1) “Reasonable service,” is the rational and logical response.¹⁵

¹⁶ In other words, worship is the only logical response to God’s mercy, which is why this follows right on the heels of Paul’s Gospel Doxology at

¹² Andrew David Naselli, *Romans*, Crossway, Wheaton, IL, 2022, p. 153.

¹³ Consider 1 Peter 2:4-5: “As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 10:31 says it this way, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

¹⁵ The Greek for “reasonable” is λογικός “pertaining to being carefully thought through, thoughtful.” William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 598.

¹⁶ The Greek for “service” is λατρεία “to perform religious rites as a part of worship—‘to perform religious rites, to worship, to venerate, worship.’ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 532.

the end of Romans 11. It's entirely proper for us, as human beings, to respond to God's mercy, by worshipping Him with our very lives.

The way we worship God with our lives is...

IV. By discerning and doing God's will each day.¹⁷ Romans 12:2 says, "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." Let's talk about the discerning first, then we'll talk about the doing. The best way to discern God's will is by renewing our minds each day. In fact, each and every one of us needs to renew our minds each and every day, because each and every day this world seeks to conform us to its pattern, rather than to God's pattern. "The pattern of this world" refers to this world's overall broken and sinful state. We're currently living in a "present evil age" which is why Romans 12:2 WARNS us "Do not conform to the pattern of this world." However... that's easier said than done.

When we think of being conformed to the pattern of this world, we can picture being squeezed into a mold, like a Christmas cutout cookie or a piece of Play-Doh.¹⁸ This world uses pressure and force to reshape us into its pattern. This world wants to make us look and feel and behave according to its standards and its wisdom, rather than the standards and wisdom of God. 1 Peter 1:14 warns us, "As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance." And just in case any of us think that we've grown so mature and so wise in our Christian faith, that we're no longer threatened by this kind of conformity, let's keep in mind the warning of 1 Corinthians 10:12, "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" Whether we're a brand-new Christian, or whether we've been following Christ for many years, we would do well to heed this warning from God's Word. "Do not conform to the pattern of this world."

It's all too easy for any one of us to fall into these worldly patterns, because this world is where we live, day in and day out. Far too often, even devoted deeply devoted followers of Jesus, can become like the frog in the pot. As we're floating around, enjoying a nice little swim, the temperature slowly gets hotter and hotter, and we don't even realize the danger we're getting into. We slowly become accustomed to the sin all around us; we gradually begin to listen to the ungodly counsel of our modern-day culture. We

¹⁷ Consider Proverbs 14:12.

¹⁸ The Greek word for "conform" is συσχηματίζω which means "to form according to a pattern or mold, form/model after something." William Arndt et al., A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 979.

acclimate, and we lower our guard.¹⁹ This world (including our online world) becomes our normal environment, and if we don't take care to renew our minds on a regular basis, it's no wonder why the patterns of our individual lives begin to match the sinful patterns of this world. Without even realizing it, we end up in the patterns of this world. Patterns of sexually immoral behavior. Patterns of the pursuit of worldly wealth and possessions. Patterns of finding our identity in what this world thinks of us rather than what our Heavenly Father thinks of us. And on and on, we end up in the various sinful patterns of this world. Ephesians 4:22-24 reminds us, "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

Well God's Word not only warns us not to conform in the wrong direction, but it also encourages us to be transformed in the right direction. Romans 12:2 declares, "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." God helps us with this transformation in two stages. First of all...

1) Our transformation begins on the day of our SALVATION.

2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" There's an amazing initial transformation that happens on the day of our salvation. We are newly created. The Holy Spirit begins to dwell inside of us. We're transformed by the incredible power of the gospel.²⁰ The next stage of our transformation happens gradually, over time.

2) Our transformation continues through our daily SANCTIFICATION.

2 Corinthians 3:18 says, "And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." When Romans 12:2 says, "be transformed," it might sound like this is a "one and done" kind of thing, but it's actually referring to an ongoing, continuing process of renewal, over time. So, we could even say, "be being transformed"²¹ That's why we use the word "becoming" when we talk about "becoming deeply devoted followers of Jesus together." "Becoming" doesn't happen overnight, but through an ongoing process of God's Spirit at work within us.

Now, Romans 12:2 doesn't spell out exactly how to renew our minds, it just emphasizes that it's important for us to do it. And it warns us that if we

¹⁹ We begin to forget that this world is not our home, that our true home is in heaven. See Philippians 3:17-21.

²⁰ See Romans 1:16.

²¹ This is "a process, not a single event." *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1910 footnote on Romans 12:2.

aren't undergoing this transformative renewal of our minds, then we'll be trapped in the pressure cooker of conforming to the pattern of this world. Fortunately though, there are many places in Scripture that give us specific strategies for how to renew our minds. Psalm 119:9-16 says, "How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word. 10 I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. 11 I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. 12 Praise be to you, LORD; teach me your decrees. 13 With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth. 14 I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. 15 I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. 16 I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word."

That last phrase really kind of grabs your attention doesn't it? "I will not neglect your word." Psalm 119 is good advice for a young person who wants to have their life transformed by the renewing of their mind, and it's good advice for us older people too! That's why we're selling Bibles out in the Connection Café, and it's why we're making Bible reading plans available. And, it's why Pastor Eric is leading an adult SS class today called, "Resolve to Read the Bible."

Another strategy for renewing our minds is found in 2 Corinthians 10:5, "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." This is why we took a more apologetics approach in our Advent sermons last month. And it's why we gave such a strong recommendation of Rebecca McLaughlin's book, "Is Christmas Unbelievable?" We need to renew our minds with what's true, and not allow the arguments and pretenses of this world to conform us, to the world's way of thinking, or to lead us astray and discourage us.

So, in 2024, let's make sure to set aside time to read and study God's Word, and to renew our minds with a right understanding of what's true, and what's false.

- > Let's make sure that our kids and grandkids get to Sunday School and Wednesday night Kids Club and Youth Group.

- > Let's make sure that we adults go to a Bible study or attend a SS class, and that we participate in a Life Group. Let's all make sure that we're renewing our minds on God's Word, in our own personal quiet times, and in our weekly times of gathering with fellow believers.

Romans 12:2 ends by referring to "...[God's] good, pleasing and perfect will." To be clear, good, pleasing, and perfect, are all defined according to God's standards, not ours. As we're consistently transformed by the renewing of our minds, it enables us to rightly discern God's will, as

opposed to our own will, or the will of this fallen world.²² (*That's why we pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."*) If we're not continually renewing our minds, then we're putting ourselves at great risk of drifting away from God's good, pleasing, and perfect will. Renewing our minds with God's perfect will, not only protects us from errors in our theology, but it also protects us from errors in our theopraxy, from errors in how we live out our Christian faith on a daily basis.^{23 24}

Now that we've considered some ways that we can renew our minds and discern God's will, let's conclude by considering how we can do God's will each day.²⁵ The rest of Romans 12 and the chapters that follow lay out all kinds of specific examples of what it means to do God's will, and we'll be looking at those in the weeks to come. But how, how do we do God's will; how do we live out HOLY lives of reverent obedience? Well, the answer is hinted at in the word "holy." We cannot be holy on our own, which is why God gives us His Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit empowers and enables us to live out God's will. By His Spirit, living within each and every believer, God helps us to accomplish His good, pleasing and perfect will. So once we've rightly discerned God's will, the best way to do it, is to depend on the Spirit's empowerment. We talked about the Spirit's empowerment back in Romans 8:26-27, "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness." We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God."

As Jesus was preparing Himself to go to the cross, He was also preparing His followers for the day when He would no longer be physically with them. In John 14:15-17 Jesus tells His followers, "If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you."²⁶ Dear friends, let us not forget our Advocate, the Holy Spirit! And let us not underestimate the Spirit's power within us! THIS is how we do God's will!

²² See *ESV* translation for Romans 12:2.

²³ God's will is absolutely perfect, "No improvement can be made on the will of God." *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1911 footnote on Romans 12:2.

²⁴ "The Christian's mindset is to be determined and reshaped by knowledge of the gospel, by the power of the Spirit, and by the concerns of the age to come, rather than by the passing fashion of this age." *The Reformation Study Bible*, Ligonier Ministries, Sanford, FL, 2015, p. 2002 footnote on Romans 12:2.

²⁵ See James 1:22, 2:14-26 and Matthew 7:21.

²⁶ And right before His ascension into heaven, Jesus told His followers in Acts 1:8, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."