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Sermon Notes

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The Highest Act of Worship

Romans 12:1-2

Introduction

The world is full of all kinds of worship

- Buddhist monks spin prayer wheels and chant and seek to empty their minds to reach enlightenment
- Hindu pilgrims travel from distant parts of their vast nation to wash in the sacred waters of the Ganges; along the way they offer small acts of devotion at various shrines to some of the literally millions of gods they are worshiping
- Muslims focus their lives of worship around their prayer times; five times a day they pray to Allah in strictly patterned ways; standing, bowing, kneeling, prostrating; once in their lifetime they go to Mecca and gather in concentric circles around the black Kaaba stone... which according to Muslim doctrine fell from heaven pure white, but was changed to black because of human sin... all Muslims pray toward this stone all over the world
- In the remote jungles of Irian Jaya, stone age tribes worship their strange and multiple deities in the traditions handed down to them from their ancestors
- Even within Christian circles, there is a wide flavor of worship patterns and styles; Eastern Orthodox churches have ornately decorated walls and elaborate paintings and gold-covered icons to stimulate worship; Roman Catholic worship centers around the Mass—their understanding of the Lord's Supper; Lutheran services retain a Catholic feel in their liturgy, but focus greatly on the Preached word; Anglican services follow the liturgy ordained by the Book of Common Prayer; Pentecostal services are characterized by speaking in tongues and spontaneous and exuberant congregational participation; seeker churches use contemporary music and a relaxed style to make seekers and unbelievers feel comfortable; some churches choose not to use musical instruments, and prefer to sing hymns a cappella

- In recent years, the subject of worship style has been a touchy one for many churches; some prefer to be as contemporary as possible to stay in touch with surrounding culture and win some of them to Christ; others desire to maintain personal purity and prefer a more exalted worship tone
- Friends... the bottom line is that human beings are, for the most part, intensely religious and constantly inventive of ways and styles of worship
- The basic concept of the Bible, though, is that acceptable worship is defined by God and God alone... God alone has the right to tell us how He is to be worshipped
- And here in our text we have the highest level of worship an individual human being can aspire to

Romans 12:1-2 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual act of worship. ² Do not conform any longer 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.

I. The Application of Christian Doctrine

A. Eleven Chapters of Profound Christian Doctrine

1. Martin Lloyd-Jones... 297 sermons on Romans 1-11
2. He said Paul was writing a synopsis of His doctrine because he couldn't visit the Romans
3. Many preachers make the mistake of preaching a synopsis of the synopsis
4. At any rate, God has carried us through some amazing, comprehensive doctrine
5. Paul completes that section with lavish praise in the magnificent doxology we looked at last week
6. Now he faces this profound question

B. "How Then Shall We Live?"

1. Francis Schaeffer's classic question
2. Americans are an amazingly practical people... we do not long endure abstract discussions of theology or philosophy or metaphysics before we begin asking questions: "How will this affect the way I live my every day life?"

3. Christianity is a way of life that embodies everything
4. God created the physical world AND the spiritual world
5. The world of the mind and of muscle; of spirit and of flesh
6. God wants us to live in the physical world in a way that honors Him
7. BUT Christianity is not merely a moral system
 - a. Ben Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanac*
 - *But dost thou love life? Then do not squander time, for that's the stuff life is made of*
 - *The sleeping fox catches no poultry*
 - *Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.*
 - *Sloth makes all things difficult, but industry all things easy*
 - *Then plow deep while sluggards sleep, And you shall have corn to sell and to keep*
 - *Not to oversee workmen is to leave them your purse open*
 - *When the well's dry, they know the worth of water*
 - b. Lots of moralistic systems
 - c. OR the business success speaker's circuit: Top Ten Hints at successful living
 - d. Christianity espouses a WORLDVIEW of truths that become the basis of commands to action
 - e. Since this is true and that is true and the other is true, HOW THEN SHALL WE LIVE
 - f. We could have gotten immediately to the moral commands, but they would have been disconnected from the worldview God wanted to give us

C. The Balanced Christian Life

1. Some are overly concerned with doctrine APART from application
2. Some are overly concerned with application APART from the doctrinal basis
3. Paul's brilliant pattern must be constantly kept alive in front of us
 - a. Again and again he teaches us what is true

b. THEN he applies it to our practical and daily lives

D. Overview of Romans 12-16

1. First: the most important application: 12:1-2... presenting you entire self to God as a living sacrifice... body, soul, mind... everything
2. Romans 12:3-8... Spiritual gifts in the Body of Christ
3. Romans 12:9-21... Living a life of love with other human beings
4. Romans 13:1-7 ... Submission to God-ordained government authorities
5. Romans 13:8-14... Love for others; personal holiness toward God
6. Romans 14:1-15:7... Living a life of love without judging others on debatable issues
7. Romans 15:8-33 ... Jews and Gentiles Glorifying Christ in One Body
8. Romans 16 ... Paul's personal greetings and final exhortations

II. You Already Presented Your Souls... Or You Can't Proceed

A. The Mercy of God in Salvation

Matthew 16:26 What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?

1. Mercy: Already Mentioned... the Central Motive of God

Romans 9:15-16 he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." ¹⁶ It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.

Romans 9:23-24 What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory-- ²⁴ even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?

Romans 11:32 For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

2. "The mercies of God..."

ESV Romans 12:1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God

- a. The word is plural... the mercies of God
- b. Most certainly refers at least to all God has done to save our souls

- c. Our souls were guilty, corrupted by sin
- d. God had mercy on our souls

Luke 18:13-14 "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' ¹⁴ "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God.

- 3. Justification is the purification of the soul from guilt for sin

Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ

- 4. This happens by the mercy of God alone
- 5. The Eternal Value of the Soul

B. Presentation of the Soul Happens Once for All Time

- 1. Your soul already His... or you cannot continue
- 2. No Unbeliever Can Proceed
- 3. At the moment of hearing with faith, you trusted in Christ
- 4. Your soul became forever His... by faith, you were saying to Christ "My soul is your possession forever"
- 5. This you do once for all time... you are His and He is yours
- 6. It is the foundation of the rest of what Paul commands

C. An Ongoing Motivation: A Constant View of God's Mercy

Romans 12:1 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.

- 1. Looking back in gratitude at mercy already given
 - a. God's mercy in sending His Son to die on the cross
 - b. God's mercy in sending you an evangelist to preach the gospel to you... maybe your mother or father; maybe a pastor or Sunday school teacher; maybe a television evangelist, or campus worker, or roommate, or missionary
 - c. God's mercy in granting you repentance and faith to believe in Christ

- d. God's mercy in forgiving all your sin on the basis of faith
- e. God's mercy in giving you the indwelling Holy Spirit
- f. God's mercy in adopting you into the family of God as His precious son or daughter
- g. PAST MERCIES... more numerous than you can count
- h. They should call from us a sense of gratitude and obligation

Romans 8:12 Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation-- but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

- 2. Looking forward in faith at more mercy to come
 - a. John Piper's Future Grace
 - b. Gratitude alone is not sufficient to conquer sin
 - c. We trust that there will be an adequate supply of mercy yet to come... mercy upon mercy, sustaining us

Lamentations 3:22-23 The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; ²³ they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

- d. By mercy we present our bodies as living sacrifices, because only by the mercy of God will He accept them

III. Present Your Body

A. The Foundational Response: Present Your Body

- 1. Amazing: Our Spiritual God cares about our physical bodies
 - a. Some are proud of their bodies
 - b. Others are ashamed of them
 - c. God wants your bodies... just as they are

Illus. The place was England, during the years of the Protectorate under Oliver Cromwell. The Protector himself addressed the famous French painter, Mr. Peter Lely, saying: "I desire you would use all your skill to paint my picture truly like me, and not flatter me at all; but

remark all these roughnesses, pimples, warts and all; otherwise I never will pay a farthing for it."

- d. But here we are, "warts and all"... and God says the highest thing you can do every day is to be transformed by a renewed mind and to present your body to Him as a living sacrifice

2. Scripture's remarkable ambivalence about our bodies

- a. Created originally in the image of God
- b. Corrupted badly by sin
- c. Headed for the grave
- d. Programmed with patterns of sin habits
- e. YET the Temple of the Living God
- f. AND the only vehicle we have for obeying God's myriad commands

3. So our proper response to the incredible mercies of God: present your bodies

B. "Present"?? How do we do that

1. Already seen this teaching in Romans 6

Romans 6:13-14 Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

2. Best picture of this is in Matthew 26 when Christ was arrested

Matthew 26:53 Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?

- a. "Reporting for duty sir"

The Roman army was the finest in the world; based on iron discipline of submission to authority... the soldier reported to the commanding officer and obeyed whatever he was commanded to do

Legendary story: Genghis Khan was trying to persuade a Persian monarch in a walled city to surrender without bloodshed; Genghis met with the Persian's emissary in his court and as a demonstration of the fanatical loyalty of his troops, he commanded one of his soldiers to kill himself... this the soldier did without hesitation

BUT NO HUMAN ARMY can compare with the heavenly one for absolute devotion to the commander... if the twelve legions of angels had reported to Christ for duty, they would have obeyed ANYTHING Christ told them to do... and Christ, being perfect would command only what was perfect and right

This is the PRESENTATION of the soul, body, mind and will... reporting to Christ for duty!

Now... how do you do this????

- b. FIRST: Do this for your entire self... ALL OF IT is at the Lord's service
 - i) Best done every day in prayer
 - ii) Offered up to God, ready to do His will, **today!!!**
- c. Basic idea: go through your members and consider each one of them valuable weapons either for Satan against God or for God against Satan
- d. Determine to enlist those powerful members again for God's service
 - i) Take my arms, Lord... use their strength to advance your kingdom
 - ii) Take my feet, Lord... use their power to carry me to where you want me to serve you
 - iii) Take my eyes, Lord... may I see your glory in the world and on the pages of the Bible
 - iv) Take my ears, Lord... may I hear your word in the mouths of others, and may I listen for the secret pain in the voices of others so I can serve them
 - v) Take my fingers, Lord... use their intricate skill to glorify you
- e. This is exactly what Fanny Crosby did with the Hymn, "Take my life and let it be..."

C. Living Sacrifices

Romans 12:1 ... offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual act of worship.

1. Sacrificial imagery is powerful in Scripture

- a. From the very beginning of the sin problem, God established the pattern of animal sacrifice

- b. In Eden, God clothed Adam and Eve with animal skins which must have come from a sacrifice
 - c. Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than his brother, the firstlings of his flock, a blood sacrifice poured out to God
 - d. After the flood, Noah offered God from the seven clean animals he had taken with him on the ark... God smelled the fragrance of the offering and swore in His heart never to bring such a flood on the earth again
2. One of the most important ways God communicates the significance of Christ's work on the cross
- a. "All sin deserves the death penalty"
 - b. "The death penalty can be paid by a substitute"
 - c. "The substitute cannot be an animal"
3. The sacrificial system has more to teach us... specifically about life after justification
- a. Old Testament sacrifices were bound and slain on the altar... they were given entirely over to the Lord as His possession
 - b. Old Testament sacrifices had to be costly... David said "I will not offer the Lord a sacrifice that costs me nothing."
 - c. Old Testament sacrificial system organized the entire religious life of the Jews, and was the center of their worship
 - d. Summary: sacrificial language describes what God wants from our daily lives after we have been justified
 - i) He wants us to present ourselves wholly to God, mentally bound and laid on the altar... given entirely over to God as His possession
 - ii) He wants us to give whatever we have that is costly, valuable, worth something... nothing is more costly than ourselves, our bodies, our minds, our very lives; serving God should be costly... a sacrifice
 - iii) He wants this principle of sacrifice to be the very center of our worship life to God
4. BUT it is to be a LIVING SACRIFICE
- a. Animals were given just once
 - b. Isaac was bound and placed on the altar just once

- c. Christ was sacrificed just once for all time
- d. BUT we are called to be LIVING SACRIFICES... an ongoing presentation of death and life... dying to live, dying to live, dying to live

Luke 9:23-24 Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.

John 12:24-26 I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. ²⁵ The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

Amy Carmichael: "A Chance to Die"

- 5. A Living Sacrifice is MUCH MORE COSTLY... it is a gift that must be given every single moment of our lives

D. Holy, Pleasing to God

1. Old Testament sacrifices had to be without blemish, a picture of holiness
2. Old Testament vessels and articles had to be set apart unto God for His sacred use, His private use
3. Old Testament priests had to consecrate themselves so that they would not be defiled as they offered the sacrifices to God
4. All of this points to a simple fact: God wants us to be HOLY sacrifices
 - a. Set apart unto God for His private use
 - b. Pure from sin and defilement in body, soul, mind, spirit
 - c. Specifically here, the focus is on bodily holiness

2 Corinthians 7:1 Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

- d. There must be a daily commitment to personal holiness in the Christian life
 - i) There are so many things that contaminate our spirit
 - ii) God wants us to put sin to death by the power of the Spirit
 - iii) He wants us to see our bodies like temples of the Holy Spirit

- e. Sexual purity is clearly a major issue
 - i) America is a sex-crazed culture
 - ii) It is easy to be defiled here... just walking through the mall, you can be assaulted by one image after another
 - iii) God desires us to be pure vessels for His glory
- f. Israelites consecrated themselves to the Lord at Sinai
- g. God wants a daily consecration to purity, to personal holiness

E. Spiritual Act of Worship

“this is your spiritual act of worship”

1. The basic act of Presentation of every area of yourself is the highest act of worship in the world
2. BUT the central act of worship is this: presenting your body as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God
3. “Spiritual act”: sometimes translated, “reasonable act”... Greek word related to the English word “logical”
4. “Act of worship” relates to the patterns of service done by priests in the temple

Hebrews 9:1 Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary.

- a. Word implies service, actions... presenting yourself to God as a servant wanting to do His bidding
- b. Word used of Jews in the Exodus

^{ESV} ***Exodus 3:12 He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."***

- c. Word also used of the temple regulations and actions connected with priestly ministry
 - i) Some priests called on to offer daily animal sacrifices
 - ii) Other Levites were simply to chop wood, draw water, clean the vessels
 - iii) Other Levites were specially called to sing praises to God

iv) Everyone had a job in the house of the Lord

Psalm 84:10 Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.

- d. Worship of God is similar to the mentality of a servant in a great castle... we exist to serve the Lord of the castle... and that service will definitely involve labors, actions
- e. That is why presenting yourself, your body is the first, the highest act of worship

F. All Of Physical Life Is Sacred

1. Ancient monasteries divided the world into the sacred and the common or profane
2. Sacred duties were religious, priestly, spiritual: offering prayers, singing chants, corporate worship, Lord's Supper, studying sacred Scripture
3. Profane or common duties were thought of as lower... washing dishes, plowing a field, cleaning a stable, eating a meal
4. From this came a distinction of the priestly class and the laity... a strong barrier of holiness separated the two
5. This whole mentality was wrong... they missed the significance of Paul's sweeping teaching on worship here
 - a. When you present your body day after day, moment by moment, you are saying "I am yours to command, you are my Lord"
 - b. Then everything you do becomes an act of worship
6. Foundational verse

1 Corinthians 10:31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

- a. You can eat a ham sandwich or drink a cup of coffee to the glory of God
- b. You can wash dishes to the glory of God
- c. You can cut your fingernails to the glory of God
- d. You can dust a bookshelf to the glory of God

- e. You can make a phone call or pay a bill or take out a library book or repair a piece of clothing or put a vacuum cleaner away to the glory of God
- f. Of course, you can also do all these things NOT to the glory of God as well
- g. For the Spirit-filled, Spirit-led, Spirit-empowered Christian, ALL of LIFE IS SACRED
- h. IF you constantly present your body to God as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to Him, then everything

IV. Present Your Mind

^{ESV} ***Romans 12:2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind***

A. Offer Your Mind to the Transforming Power of God

1. Simple point here... in both cases the mind is passive, the recipient of outside influence
2. The question is: what are you subjecting your mind to?
3. We speak of being “under the influence”
4. What are you presenting your mind to? To the world to be shaped by it, or to God and His word, to be shaped by it?

B. More Next Time

V. Present Your Will

Vs. 2 Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-- his good, pleasing and perfect will.

A. Knowing and Doing God's Will

B. End Result: You WILL Be Willing

C. More Next Time

VI. Application: Are You Presenting Yourself?

A. Have You Presented Your Soul?

1. Have you come once for all to the Lord Jesus Christ and said, “I am yours... you are my Savior and my King. I am yours to save, and I am yours to command”?

2. Have you trusted in Christ for the salvation of your soul?
3. Have you been bought with a price?
4. Do you consider yourself a bonds slave of Jesus Christ, once for all?

B. Are You Presenting Your Body?

1. Do you see the physical world, your body, and your daily life as belonging to God?
2. Do you actively and formally present your self every day in your morning quiet time?
 - a. Do you specifically present your eyes, your mouth, your hands and feet, your stomach, every part of you to God as a living sacrifice?
 - b. Are you willing to die to your own fleshly drives... to put them to death by the Spirit?
 - c. Are you presenting everything else to God as His: your time, your money, your spiritual gifts, your family, your opportunities
3. Do you renew this presentation moment by moment throughout the day?

C. Are You Presenting Your Mind?

1. Are you presenting your mind to the world for its corrupting influence?
2. OR Are you presenting your mind to God, specifically to God's word for its transforming power... being transformed by the renewing of your mind?

D. Are You Presenting Your Will?

1. Are you testing and approving what is God will for you?
2. Are you discerning your purpose and place in life?
3. Are you gladly approving of God's will for you?
4. Are you choosing God's will for your life?