



Pastor Michael O'Neill
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Part Two

Hebrews 12:28-29; Romans 12:1-2

1. ☸

2. Offer

3. Bodies

- Romans 6:13; 1 Corinthians 6:12-13, 19-20;
Mark 12:30; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Matthew 16:25

4. Living Sacrifice

- Hebrews 10:10, 18, 13:15; Colossians 3:17;
Romans 12:1-2, 13:15; Hebrews 12:29;
1 Corinthians 3:16

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West Valley Church
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The Heart of Worship, Pt. Two **Hebrews 12:28-29; Romans 12:1-2**

Not too long ago I saw an SUV on the road as I was driving to work. The owner of the SUV was clearly a person of deep loyalty. The spare tire mounted on the back had a giant, green, capital "O" on it. The window sticker had a big yellow "O" on it. The trailer hitch displayed another "O" and the word "Ducks." The license plate frame was bordered with the words "Ducks" on top and "University of Oregon" at the bottom.

But something didn't add up. That license plate frame was screwed into a blue-and-white, Washington, "Evergreen State" license plate with a picture of Mount Rainier on it. I live here in Washington, and the SUV's license plate shows that the driver does, too. I assume the owner of this SUV has recently moved, but has not yet identified with his new home and has no plans of changing loyalties.

That's normal human behavior – usually when we move, we go through a slow transition of loyalties to our new home. I'm sure it will be that way for Pastor Roger and his family when they move to Yakima next month after being in Kansas City for so many years. When Roger and Joy came out to interview last month, we left a gift basket in their room, and just to help them with the transition, there were several items with Seahawks' branding on them!

But that transition is not unlike what we go through as a Christian. When we come to Christ, the kingdom of God becomes our home, but the kingdom of this world does not leave our hearts easily. The call of God on the life of the Christian is to overcome divided loyalties and fully identify with God's kingdom. And the way this is demonstrated is not through window stickers and license frames, but through a life devoted in love to God and to others, and the expression of that love to God is our worship.

What is worship? That's what we are exploring in this series during the month of February. We're calling this series, "The Heart of Worship."

We are attempting to get past what passes for worship these days – song styles, light shows, fog machines, video technology, concerts, and on and on – and get at what the heart of worship is. Not that those things are necessarily bad – if they can be used appropriately in order to facilitate worship, but those are the *means* to worship, not worship itself. I'm afraid that in church culture today, many of us worship "worship" itself, instead of using those things as a means to worship Christ.

As I mentioned, Pastor Roger Allen will be arriving as our worship pastor next month, but he's giving input into this sermon series, and he is already working with us planning worship services from now till Easter. In his words: "Worship is a big word. It carries with it all kinds of ideas. Is it about music, style, preference, church

experiences? Yes, it certainly must include those things. But if our understanding of worship is confined to these narrow parameters, we have an incomplete conception of worship.” He’s right!

So what ought to be our conception of worship? What is at the heart of worship? Last week we saw from Hebrews 12:28-29 that worship is our grateful response to the amazing love of God for us, and that it means we will shake off everything that is not of Christ in order that we may continue to grow in our relationship with him and in Christlikeness, being consumed by his love for us. That idea of God being a consuming fire of love for us is a driving factor in our worship and a theme in this series; we seek to be completely consumed in God’s love, and worship is our continual, grateful response. I spoke to someone this week who has recently come to faith in Christ, and he shared his life is so significantly changed because every day he is aware that he is loved by God, and so he lives gratefully every day, at peace with whatever he faces, looking for ways he can show that love to others that he encounters at home and at work. His is an incredibly inspiring and encouraging story, and you’ll get to hear some of it at the baptism service on March 5.

So today we are going to see a similar thought to last week, but this time from the Apostle Paul, in a famous and often-quoted passage from the Letter to the Romans, in Chapter twelve. This is what it 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*. 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.” (Romans 12:1-2, niv)

I want you to notice that in that passage, Paul writes, “This is your true and proper worship,” and that it is “good and pleasing” to God. That’s an indicator that we are being told what the heart of true and proper worship is about. So let’s take some time and see if we can understand this passage in a way that will change our relationship with God and will change our worship. As we go along, you will be able to fill in the blanks in the outline in your worship folder, and we’ve listed the Scripture references there so that you can go back and do your own, more in-depth time in the Word.

But I want to start the first point with this:

1. ∴

That might catch your attention because it is not a word; it is a symbol. Do you know what it stands for? (Those of you who remember your geometry will know what this is).

It is a symbol for the word “therefore.” In geometry, the “therefore” symbol indicates the conclusion of the equation. For example, you might say:

$$A=B, B=C, \therefore A=C$$

(This is the transitive theorem – or is it a postulate? Anyway,) the “therefore” is an indicator that, since these things are true, it means the conclusion is true. Whenever you see the word “therefore” in the Bible, you have to stop and ask yourself, “What’s it there for?” So what is this one there for? Up until chapter twelve in Romans, Paul has been teaching some very heavy duty, very important theology. Paul was brilliant and filled with the Spirit. His mind could sweep across eternity and he would speak or teach some amazingly heavenly truths, but he never lived there; he kept his feet firmly planted on the earth and his theology is very practical. The “therefore” is like a hinge on the door between the deep spiritual truths he just shared and the practical application of it that follows. So what we are looking at is going to help us apply truth to our lives about worship.

Paul offers us the literary cue *therefore* to alert us of a new direction in his writing. At times in the Bible, it’s difficult to detect the logical significance of this transitional word; it is usually used simply to signal a transition. Here, however, it carries greater significance.

Paul’s great discussion in the first eleven chapters is all about sin, divine grace that leads to our salvation, and faith. It is all about everything God has done for us in the free gift of Christ’s death on the cross and resurrection from the dead, and the subsequent work of the Spirit in our lives. It could all stand on its own as a masterpiece of theological reasoning. But all of the great ideas Paul presented in the first eleven chapters are like a proof in geometry; they move forward in a definite sequence toward a compelling conclusion. And, like Paul’s discussion, a geometric proof closes with a “therefore” (the mathematical symbol) to indicate, “*this* is what all the steps above are seeking to demonstrate.”

Paul’s **therefore** in the opening sentence of chapter 12 affirms that God’s plan of salvation for every person should lead to a transformed life. Being saved and given a right standing with God is an incredible and glorious experience for the person who lives by faith. But the goal of this new relationship with God is a *new creation*.¹ That new creation is transformed to worship God.

I might add that if you are motivated, you should go back and read the first eleven chapters of Romans – it will help you put this message into a greater context.

Paul reminds us that the “therefore” – the response to God’s grace that he gives us, takes into consideration the great love of God – a love that is demonstrated in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for us, a love that is present at every moment of our lives, a love that is present on every square inch of this planet and is evident in every atom of creation. In view of God’s sacrificial, selfless, unconditional love for us, considering His great love for us, in light of this amazing love for us, we ought to...

¹ Clarence L. Bence, [*Romans: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*](#) (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1996), 194.

2. *Offer*

...to God something in worship; and that “something” is ourselves. *We must understand that worship is going to take a full and complete commitment to Christ.* Paul makes this point by first talking about presenting ourselves to God. The word “present” means to give once, totally and completely, and then to continue to yield. The “offering” of yourself is a complete surrender to God and then an ongoing surrender of yourself to God.

You might wonder what Paul means to “offer yourself to God.” It’s important to understand this. Before you were a Christian, the grace of God was reaching out to you, helping you be aware of your need for God and the sin in your life that came between you and him. That same grace, what we call “prevenient grace,” or “the grace that goes before,” that grace also gives you the power to choose his salvation. *That* choosing is different than *this* choice to offer yourself. When you first receive salvation and enter into this new relationship with God as your Father, you chose to accept what he did for you in Christ and the forgiveness he offers you. But in *this* case, *after you are saved*, you are responding to all of God’s love for you, out of love and gratitude to him. This is important: this offering is *what you are doing for God*, rather than about *what God has done for you*. When you accepted salvation, you did it for what you could get out of it: freedom from guilt and sin, a new start, an abundant life, and heaven someday. But *this* offering of yourself in worship that Paul is talking about here is not something you are doing for what you can get out of it: you are doing it only as a response, an expression of pure love in view of God’s mercy, which you have already experienced. We are to make this commitment of our lives as an act of worship, not as some sort of gift in order to get something in return for ourselves.

That offering is our...

3. *Bodies*

When the Bible tells us here to offer our bodies, this is not metaphorical; we are meant to take it literally. In chapter 6 of Romans, we were told:

“Do not let any part of your bodies become tools of wickedness, to be used for sinning; but give yourselves completely to God—every part of you—for you are back from death and you want to be tools in the hands of God, to be used for his good purposes.” (Romans 6:13, tlb)

When it says to no longer offer our bodies for sinful actions – that was meant literally; that we should not take action with our bodies to carry out sinful behaviors. Right? Well now, here in chapter 12, the term “bodies” is meant literally as well. God literally desires to be Lord of your life – of what you do with your body, of what you do with your physical existence and actions. God saves ALL of you.

In the church in Corinth in the Bible, there was an attitude going around that said that since we have been saved, we can do whatever we want. There was a belief

back then – that is still around today – that says that the physical body is sinful and won't last forever, so it doesn't matter what you do with your body; you can do whatever you want! They would say that physical urges that are sinful are just biological drives. Besides, "God will forgive you anyway," was their thinking. But that is *wrong* thinking! And the Bible says this:

"I have the right to do anything,' you say—but not everything is beneficial. 'I have the right to do anything'—but I will not be mastered by anything. You say, 'Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both.' The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body." (1 Corinthians 6:12-13, niv)

Then, later in that chapter, it says this:

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

The word for "bodies" is the physical body, not some metaphorical meaning.

When God saved you, he saved ALL of you. He didn't just save your spirit, or just your soul, or just your mind. He doesn't want you just occupying an irredeemable body until he can come back and give you a new body. God wants to save EVERY part of your life – mind, soul, and strength – which is how much you and I are commanded to love God according to Jesus himself:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." (Mark 12:30, niv)

The work that God does in your life is a total, complete work that encompasses everything you are. God's saving isn't just a spiritual metaphor; it is an entire-life-thing: body, soul, and spirit:

"May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thessalonians 5:23, niv)

You and I are to offer ourselves – *everything* we are – as an offering to God as a grateful response in worship to everything he has given for us; the life of his One and Only Son in our place.

But here's the amazing thing: when we offer our very bodies – everything we are and do – to God in worship, God gives us back all kinds of abundant life. Jesus said,

"All who want to save their lives will lose them. But all who lose their lives because of me will find them." (Matthew 16:25, ceb)

You and I should be greatly encouraged to know that we are not just stuck in some kind of sinful groundhogs-day body, destined to keep repeating the same sin over and over again. Instead, knowing how much God loves us and all he's done for us, we offer to God our entire lives, lock, stock, and barrel – and then we *keep* offering

ourselves to God continuously – and we find that we will have the power, by the presence of Christ in our lives through the Holy Spirit – to live the free-from-sin life we’ve always wanted to live, that we were created in the first place to live, that we really long to be able to live.

You see, when we offer our bodies to God, it’s not meant to be literally a physical suicide; instead, you offer to God a...

4. Living Sacrifice

We are to continually give our entire selves to God, as, what Paul calls, “living sacrifices.” To understand that, you first need to know that there were two main types of offerings when the Jews worshipped at the Temple. One type of offering was the kind that led to reconciliation. In other words, you did something wrong, you sinned, and so you had to pay for it. To atone for that sin, you had to sacrifice a bull or a lamb or a dove or some grain or perfume or whatever had to be sacrificed—had to be given up—to pay for that sin (there were different sacrifices for different sins), and therefore the offering of that sacrifice would allow the relationship with God to be reconciled. That’s the first type of sacrifice. Got it?

The second kind of sacrifice happened *after* the first sacrifice, and the second one was to celebrate – to celebrate the restoration of the relationship with God, or to celebrate some great thing that God had done. Do you follow that? So here’s why that’s significant to this passage: Jesus Christ has *already* made the first kind of sacrifice for us! We don’t have to make that one if we’ve accepted it. That’s why the Bible says:

“For God’s will was for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all time.” (Hebrews 10:10, nlt)

And again,

“When sins have been forgiven, there is no need to offer any more sacrifices.” (Hebrews 10:18, nlt)

So since Jesus is the first sacrifice for the sin we’ve committed, Paul is not telling us make ourselves a sacrifice for *that*. We don’t have to pay for our sins; we simply accept the sacrifice of himself that Jesus paid in our place – we don’t have to make that sacrifice. Got it? So what’s left then is the second sacrifice: the sacrifice of celebration, or praise, or *worship*. And *that’s* what our lives are to be. That’s why the Bible says:

“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name.” (Hebrews 13:15, nlt)

So our lives are to be lived as a constant sacrifice of worship to God through Jesus Christ as a loving response to what he’s done for us, and our lives should declare that worship! Remember, we are told to present our *bodies*; which means that our entire beings – whatever we do with this body we live in – our entire lives should be

worship to God. Everything we do all the time everywhere we go is to be done as praise to Jesus. That's why the Bible says:

“Everything you do or say, then, should be done in the name of the Lord Jesus, as you give thanks through him to God the Father.” (Colossians 3:17, gnb)

There's something else here about the offering. Paul is referring to the burnt offering. This was an offering of an animal brought to the altar to God as an expression of devotion, and which was totally consumed by fire on the altar. Think about that – don't you think there must have been moments when the priest and the one offering the sacrifice questioned the practical wisdom of burning up all that good meat? Think of the roasts and steaks that were burned to a crisp, and nobody got to eat them. There were other offerings that did allow for them to eat certain parts of the sacrifice. But the burnt offering was a *total* gift to God, *holy and pleasing* in His sight, just as our offering of ourselves to God must be (Romans 12:1).²

Remember what we said last week about our God being an all-consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29)? That's the same imagery we are talking about here.

Remember that Paul says that giving our entire lives (as a way to praise God) is “your true and proper worship.” Do you understand what that means? It means that your worship style has *nothing* to do with music; it has *everything* to do with your life-style. You worship God with your LIFE, not just with your song. In fact, the song means nothing without your life style, and your life gives meaning to the song style. What I'm saying (not very subtly, I guess) is that you and I tend to make worship about *songs* and their *style*—about singing and even the style of the music. But GOD says that worship is about life-style, not song style; worship is how we live our lives for him.

Let me explain more: remember that in the Old Testament, people worshipped God at the Temple—that was the sacred place that worship happened at, because God was there. But, because of what Jesus has done for us as believers...

“Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16, nlt)

The Spirit of God is not confined to a stone temple but lives in every believer. That means that your body, and everything you do in it and with it, is a place of worship because the presence of God is there.

There's another “therefore” in Romans, in chapter 13:

“Therefore, let us offer through Jesus a continual sacrifice of praise to God, proclaiming our allegiance to His name.” (Hebrews 13:15, nlt)

Do you want Sunday worship to be a powerful experience? Then don't depend on any of our great worship leaders or singers or musicians or me for that. Don't expect Pastor Roger to provide that for you when he gets here – not if you aren't living a life of worship. If you want Sunday worship to be a powerful experience,

^{2 2} Clarence L. Bence, *ibid.*, 196-197

then spend Monday through Saturday offering your body as a living sacrifice of worship to God. *Then* come here so that together all of us can offer ourselves in song, in prayer, and in giving. *That* will make *this* supernatural. Because by the way, if you look back at Romans 12:1-2 you will notice something:

“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*. 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.”
(Romans 12:1-2, niv)

The instruction from Romans 12:1-2 is *plural*: “brothers and sisters,” “your bodies,” — it is for *all of us*. It means we are in this together!

So let’s get back to the heart of worship. Would the worship team please come up and prepare to lead us in worship? And as we do, I want to give you some instructions: without me speaking, without any of us singing, with simply the music playing in the background, I want you to spend some time in prayer, and follow the prompts that will be on the screen. There will be three prompts, and I’m not going to announce them so you will want to keep an eye on the screen, and talk to God, making some decisions, and then respond as you choose. You can come to the altar if that will help you.

Slide #1:

“In view of God’s Mercy”

Consider how much God loves you, by sending His Son to die for you. Have you accepted His Love? Contemplate His Love, and be grateful.

Slide #2:

“Offer your bodies”

Commit your entire life to God, not to get anything in return, but only to give yourself completely to Him. Be serious about committing all of yourself to Him.

Slide #3:

“As Living Sacrifices”

Your commitment is not just for one time, but also for all time. Yours is a continual offering. Determine to live for God with your entire life: body, soul, and spirit, determining that every thought and every action will be for His glory.

Moments of silence.

Song: “I’m coming back to the heart of worship”