

Living Sacrifice: What True Worship Looks Like

Passage: Romans 12:1-2 | Speaker: Steve Grothoff | Date: September 27, 2026

SUMMARY

Steve Grothoff walks through Romans 12:1-2 to ask what true, acceptable worship actually looks like -- and how we drift into worship God never asked for. He traces real biblical examples of unacceptable worship (worshiping false gods, worshiping the true God in a self-styled way instead of His way, and going through religious motions with a false heart) before showing that acceptable worship flows from a mind renewed by God, not conformity to the world. The sermon closes by widening worship beyond Sunday singing into a whole-life pattern: obedience, love, generosity, discipleship, testimony, and gathering with the church.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Worship means presenting our whole lives to God as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1), not just something we do on Sunday morning.
- Scripture shows real patterns of unacceptable worship: worshiping false gods, worshiping the true God our own way instead of His way, and empty ritual from a false heart.
- Acceptable worship comes from being transformed by a renewed mind, not from being conformed to the world (Romans 12:2).
- Practical worship includes love, obedience, generosity, teaching and discipling others, sharing our testimony, and gathering with the church -- not singing alone.
- The sermon closes with an invitation to fully surrender to Christ as the truest act of worship.

Introduction

All right, this morning we are going to be in Romans 12 1 and 2. We are going to be talking about worship this morning. And man, if that wasn't a perfect example of what worship should look like, um, I know Hallie was crying. I was too, um. So I'm gonna call us both out. Because, so if you guys would stand with me, we are going to be said Romans 12 chapters 1 or chapter 12 verses 1 and 2.

Scripture Reading: Romans 12:1-2

Paul writes to the Roman church, and he says, I appeal to you therefore, brother brothers, 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 by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Opening Prayer

Father, we thank you. We thank you for your word. Father, we thank you that through your word, you, you show us what true worship of you looks like. You explain that to us, you point that out to us, and Father, we have examples of that, um, throughout your word. So Father, we also, we, we just thank you for the ability to come to you, and, and really truly rest in who you are, and, and, and be able to truly worship the nature of who you are, and, and just the, the beauty of, of creation and everything that goes into that. Father, that, that as we're going to find out, Father, there are, there are multiple, multiple ways that we can worship you. So Father, we thank you for that. We thank you for the gift of your Son. We thank you for the sacrifice that he made so that we can come to you, so that he bridged that gap, so that we could come to you and we could have the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ. So Father, we ask all of these things in his name. Amen. All right, so this morning I've got two questions and a statement for you guys. Well, actually, the first question, why do you guys come here every Sunday? Why are you here?

Setting the Stage: Why Do You Come to Church?

Do you know? Do you just come because it's habit? Do you come because it's what your family did? Do you come because your parents are going to bother you if you don't show up, and they're like, well, why weren't you here? Or maybe you're just young enough that you get drug here every week anyways. But why do you come? Why do you come? What is the purpose? What is the reason that you're here? Because the reason that each and every one of us should be here is because we at least are beginning to have an understanding that there is a God who has done immeasurable things in each of our lives, and our worship to Him is why we should be here. We are here; this is a worship service. It's not just worship music. This time right now is is worship, us spending time in His Word and talking about His Word and being in His Word. Sunday school was worship. We're going to talk about all these kinds of things, and I'm not going to give you a fully exhaustive list because, well, we just don't have the time. So I'm going to give you the most, the the greatest ones, and the ones that I really want you to cover. But what I want us to really truly understand is is is two very distinct things: that one,

there is such a thing as acceptable worship, and two, they're also converse to that, there is such a thing as unacceptable worship, and things that are not okay, things that that we may do thinking that they're considered worship, and they are not.

Two Kinds of Worship: Acceptable and Unacceptable

So our first question is going to be, what is acceptable worship? Then we're going to talk about worship is a serious business. What we do, we shouldn't take it lightly. When we, when we worship, we do not take that lightly. And number three, we're going to talk about how Scripture laid that out for us. What is considered worship according to Scripture? Again, this isn't going to be a fully exhaustive list. This is going to be more of a quick overview because we just we don't have the time. Once you were a born again justified Christian and dwelt with the Holy Spirit, the rest of your life can be considered worship. Anything and everything you do from there on out can be considered worship. So we should want to do it to the best of our abilities. Now we see some places in uh in throughout Scripture, we see in the Old Testament in Isaiah 26, when Isaiah goes to the throne room of God, that they're worshipping. They're up there worshipping.

God's Holiness: Worship Fit for Who God Is

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. We read that in Revelation too. John is in the throne room. John gets transported to the throne room of God. Same thing. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. So what we need to understand is our worship of God doesn't end when we die. That is going to be our eternity. We are going to spend the rest of eternity worshipping a God that we love because we know what he's done for us. So if you don't enjoy it now, man, what are you going to do for the rest of eternity? You're not going to enjoy it then either. Hopefully you will, but we need to learn to to really truly enjoy our worship time and and and focus on what exactly that looks like and what that means for each and every one of us.

Point 1: What Is Acceptable Worship?

So first point, what is acceptable worship? I'm going to give you a bit of a wordy explanation if anybody wants it. And like I've said before, if you guys ever want a copy of my notes or anything like that, you feel free to ask. I will print you a copy. True and acceptable worship is any and every expression of praise, honor, adoration, gratitude, and or reverence to the one true God by a regenerate soul who knows the truth about God and loves Him. Now I pulled some of that from John MacArthur, but I added to it and kind of shaped it, and kind of shaped it for us too. These expressions are characterized by love, devotion, and obedience. I'm gonna read that for you guys one more time, just

so you guys. True and acceptable worship is any and every expression of praise, honor, adoration, gratitude, and or reverence to the one true God by a regenerate soul who knows the truth about God and loves Him, and these expressions are characterized by love, devotion, and obedience. So what is acceptable worship? The Shema in the Old Testament. The what, the, the Jewish kids, one of the first things they learned, the foundational part of what the kids learned about God was the Shema, and it's to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. Sounds easy enough, right? It doesn't sound easy. How do you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength, everything that you do?

The First Commandment and Love for God

Should be because you love God. Then, as He lays out the Ten Commandments for Moses, the very first commandment tells us what worship should look like that you will have no other gods beside Me. You will only, only look to Me. You will only worship Me. You will have no other gods beside Me. Then He gets into what can unacceptable worship look like. We reared in the second commandment, Don't take the name of the Lord in vain. What does that mean? What is in vain? We think of it as saying, you know, curse words that use God or Jesus in them. And, and, and that can, that is, that is true. But, but the purview of what in vain means is much larger than that. In vain means anytime that you, in vain, the, the, the phrase means disrespectful, unsuccessful, fruitless, or insufficient. This isn't just using the name of God incorrectly or inappropriately. This also includes anytime we cheapen or diminish from the fact, the fact, the name and the nature of God. Anytime we do that. If you falsely swear by His name for false credibility, I don't know if you guys have ever heard of, there's a, he's, I don't know anything really else about him. I just remember listening to the radio when I was growing up, and on, uh, there's a, a comedian named Donnie Baker on there, and his catchphrase thing to say was, I swear to God I will, like falsely swearing with the name of God for false credibility. We use that frivolously. Do we use that in a way that, that is not okay? This also comes into play when you speak the name of the Lord in vain, when you are speaking in any way that is contradictory to the attributes of God. We went through the attributes study this last winter. Any of those attributes, if you don't speak of God in a highway, in a highly exalting way, and we see this happen. Satan in the garden is a perfect example of this. Satan in the garden, God didn't say that.

Did God Really Say? Worship Undermined

Did he? Well, you won't die, he says. He says no, God. God just doesn't want you to know the truth. Essentially, what he's saying is God's a liar, God's evil. Don't worry about what God has to say. You don't need that. You need to do this. He diminished from the name and the nature of God. Third way this happens, and we see this in a lot of different circles of even Christianity, saying you speak for God

when you in fact do not. Well, God told me. Well, God said to me. Jesus spoke to me and said. I'm sorry, I disagree. I don't think that that's the case. I don't think that that's. Can God speak to you? Yes, right here through this. This is how God speaks to you. You probably aren't going to receive some new revelation, but people use that in a way to convince and coerce others to believe things that are in fact contrary to what this book says.

Unacceptable Worship: Idolatry

So, three means of unacceptable worship. Number one: worshiping false gods, the first commandment, idolatry. That's idolatry, and we're gonna expand on that a little bit too, because idolatry is placing anything more important than God. That's not just well we worship Baal or we worship Hermes or Zeus or these, these other false gods. This is when we make anything, anything other than God, into the thing that we put top priority on. These things can be things like our spouses, our kids, our jobs, our hobbies, possessions of ours, and for some, even people I know, their knowledge of God can be their idol. Knowing things about God but not knowing God, knowing things and having all of this knowledge, all of this information, and all of these things that I know, all of these things, but they don't apply it in their life. They treat it as a thing that's more important than God. The next way that can happen is we can worship the true God, but we can do it in a false way. We, we, we see this three different places specifically in the Old Testament. Leviticus 10: Nahab and Abihu offer up profane fire to God, and God kills them on the spot. God said this is what I laid out for you to do, this is what you do, this is how you are to worship Me, and they defaulted to the way that they thought was better. They were worshiping God, but they weren't doing it in the proper way. We see this also: Moses comes down off the mountain, and they're worshiping a golden calf. This is the God that, that delivered us from the Egyptians. They were worshiping God, but He also told them not to make any idols out of gold or silver. What happens? 3,000 people, 3,000 of them drop. The third time we see this: Uzzah touched the ark. They're hauling the ark out on a cart, which is the improper way to haul the Ark of the Covenant. They didn't do it just because he touched it; God did it because they were inappropriately taking care of the things that God told them. He says be careful with the holy things. We should be doing the same thing.

Unacceptable Worship: Self-Styled Worship

How, how often do we worship God, but in the way that we think is best, in the way that we want to do it? Self styled worship. Well, I can do this because this is how I worship God, but if it's not pointing to God, it's not worship, and

Unacceptable Worship: False-Hearted Worship

Three, we see this a lot in the New Testament, worshiping the true God in a true way but with a false heart. False hearted worship. Isaiah also read talks about this, but Jesus specifically in the Gospels calls the Pharisees names for these exact things, goes off on the Pharisees about what they're doing. He calls them names like hypocrites, brood of vipers, whitewashed tombs, blind guides, and he quotes Isaiah, and he says, they honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. In vain they worship me. We also see, I'm going to flip back to it, you guys don't have to, Isaiah 1. God is speaking to Isaiah toward the Israelites, and he says, To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices for me? I've had enough burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or goats. Bring no more futile sacrifices, incense is an abomination to me. I cannot endure iniquity and sacred teaching, or sacred meeting, you, your appointed feasts. My soul hates these, are a trouble to me. I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you. Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves clean, cease to do evil, learn to do good, seek justice. God says, You're doing all these things. Yes, you're doing all the things I asked you to do. Yes, you're doing them for me, but the reason you're doing them is wrong. You're doing these things, and you're still going off and living the way you want to live, and thinking, well, you know, I've got to do these sacrifices. So no, our heart, what we do, if we don't do it with a pure heart, it is not glorifying to God. So we've gotten into it, and we're going to get into a little bit more, but.

Point 2: Worship Is a Serious Business

Second point there: worship is a serious business. We just talked about this. Any form of worship towards God in a way not prescribed by Him, or from an impure heart, is superficial, self-indulgent, inappropriate, shallow, hypocritical, and false. This goes for our speech, our songs, our thoughts, and our actions. Our worship is for God and God alone. That's it. We do not worship anything else. Our worship is for God and God alone. We don't worship to make ourselves feel good. We don't worship in a way that appeals to other people. We worship in a way that God wants us to worship. When we focus on any aspect of worship towards anything other than God, we're not worshiping God. We're either worshiping our own wants and desires, or we're worshiping someone else, someone else's thoughts, someone else's wants and desires. Acceptable worship is the product of truly understanding the word of God and the will of God. If you know this, you will worship God well. Knowing this, knowing who God is, knowing the nature of God, knowing the will of God, is how, is where proper worship comes from. Unserious, unacceptable worship to God comes from a people who are not serious enough about the true nature of God. Worship is serious business, and we live in a time where people are casual and irreverent with their view of God and Jesus. It's some celestial vending machine. Well, I

put this in so I get this out, or well, Jesus is my Savior, but I don't live like He's my Lord. I'm reading a book right now by one of my favorite pastors, and it's talking about reintroducing the fear of God into a postmodern world. We no longer have a fear of the Lord. A fear isn't talking about being scared of God, but it's talking about being respectful of His nature. We don't have a fear of God anymore. Proverbs 9 10 says, fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. Do we fear the Lord enough that when we worship, we do it in a way that we know is pleasing to Him? There in

Not Conformed, But Transformed (Romans 12:2)

Verse 2, it tells us not to be conformed to the way of the world. The world lives a certain way. We should look contradictory to that, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Well, how do you renew your mind? What does that mean? You renew your mind. You spend time in the word. You get to know who God is. You form a wisdom about who God is. That leads us into this point: The deeper and stronger your understanding of who God is, so the better you understand God. The better that you know, personally know, who God is in your life, the deeper and stronger your understanding of God, the higher and greater your worship and praise of him can be. If you have a shallow thought of who God is, you have a pretty shallow thought about worshiping him. When we really, truly, truly understand God and truly understand who he is, our worship is so deep now.

Whole-Life Worship

What is considered worship according to scripture? Which parts of this church service, which parts of this service, are considered worship? Is it just the singing part? Was it just when we were singing? That was great. It was good. It was. It was. I believe that was. I wholeheartedly believe that was acceptable to God because the songs that we were singing were about God. The songs that we were singing were pointing to His nature, and that is important. But it's not just the singing part. It's not just me standing up here. This is worship. This right now, what we are doing, is worshiping God. Offertory giving was worshiping God. Sunday school was worshiping God. All of it. When we do things and we do it for the glory of God, that is considered worship to God. But that's not it. The bits and pieces of a worship service is not the only thing that is considered worship. Like I said earlier, the beginning of that definition was true and acceptable worship is any and every expression, any and every. That's not just confined to these walls, guys. That's everything you do outside of here. That's everything you do at your job. That's everything you do at your house. That's everything you do if you are doing it to the best of your abilities for the glory of God. You can consider that worship. Our whole life should be acceptable worship to God. Music is not worship. Music is not worship. Music is a vehicle, is a mode of worship. It's a way that we can worship. Like I said, Hallie and I were both over

here crying during it as well. It's one of my favorite songs. It can invoke emotion, but what emotion was that? Because I know for me, in that song specifically, it's not because of some swelling musical thing that's happening. It's not an emotional thing that's pinned in any way to the music. It's the lyrics. It's the words. It's the understanding in that song of the will of God. It is well with my soul. It does not matter what is going on in my life, it is well with my soul.

Practical Ways to Worship, from Scripture

music is a great way to worship but it is not the only way to worship I'm going to give you like I said not an exhaustive list but I'm going to give you a list and I'm going to give you where it says in scripture that these are the things so what are other ways other than psalms hymns and spiritual songs prayer sermon on the mount Jesus is explaining that prayer is an act of spiritual worship to God he says to pray in private and then he gives them a perfect model of what a prayer should look like and he gives us the Lord's prayer John 4 24 Jesus is talking to the woman at the well and for whatever reason however it came up he's having this conversation with her and it immediately leads into worship and he says that we are to worship God in spirit and truth ministry and service serving the church serving other people and ministering to others is a form of worship Matthew 5 16 Jesus says in the same way let your light shine before others that they may see your good deeds and glorify your father in heaven when you are serving others do it for the glory of God 1st Thessalonians 2 8 we loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well because you had become so dear to us our ministry and service to others is worship our ministry and service to others can also be go back a couple weeks a good way to disciple others serve other people and guess what you build a relationship with somebody and then you can glorify God in it by introducing them and helping them reach a deeper understanding of who God is teaching and preaching Sunday school this right here 1st Timothy 4 12 and 13 Paul is writing to Timothy a new pastor in training and he says set an example for them in speech in conduct in love in Faith in purity, and he says, until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Paul says the best way to make more Christians, read Scripture to them, read Scripture with them, teach them what it means. Colossians 128, he is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. Talked about this a little bit too last week, gratitude and thanksgiving. You can worship God through your gratitude and your thanksgiving. Being thankful for what God has done in your life is a great place to start worshipping him. Psalm 100 verse 4, enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him and praise his name. That last part, give thanks to him and praise his name, they go hand in hand. Giving thanks to him and praising his name, one is going to lead to the other. Hebrews 12 28, therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship with reverence. And all be grateful for what God's done in your

life, and then offer him acceptable worship. I mentioned it earlier, giving off a Tory and just giving in general. Paul writes to the Philippians in 4 18, and he says that their gifts were a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. In 2 Corinthians 9 7, he tells the Corinthian church that God loves a cheerful giver. Our acts of giving show our faith that God will always provide for us. I may not have it, but I'm going to offer it to you because I know that God will always provide for me. Final one we're going to talk about today, fellowship and communion. Hebrews 10 25, and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another. 1 Corinthians 11 26, as often as you eat. this bread and drink this cup do it in remembrance of the Lord's death until he comes again worship God the early church was great at this the early church was really good at this and we have a perfect example of that I'm going to read to you guys five verses here Acts 2 42 through 47 they're writing about the church and it says and they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and the fellowship and to the breaking of bread and prayers and awe came upon every soul and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles and all who believed were together and had all things in common and they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need and and and day and day attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes they received their food with glad and generous hearts praising God and having favor with all the people that whole list that I gave you guys in these verses there it is what is the result of that the last verse there in Acts chapter two is and the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved guys when we worship properly when we worship well and when we do it in a way that everybody else sees people are going to ask questions people are going to be curious and you know what that is where the adding to the number comes from our life the way we live it I've told you guys before our testimony is the strongest thing that we have to be able to bring somebody else to Christ your testimony you're still living it right now it's not just what God has done for you it's what God is still doing for you so if you're doing everything in your life and you are pointing people to God with it he will not take that lightly worshiping God is not just confined inside these walls again when we're together or when We're together for a Bible study or fellowship meal. If we're just together as Christians, that's, that's not the only time that we can worship. You can worship by yourself, guys. I have, I have great times by myself. I have a 45 minute drive, and if people saw me in my car, people that do see me in my car when I'm listening to worship music or praying out loud, and people would think I'm crazy because I stand over here and don't really get into it a whole lot. But man, when I am by myself, it is some of the best worship that I have because I spend my time. It's just me and God. It's just me and Jesus. It's just me and him talking. It's just me and him, me worshiping him in the songs that I sing, or the stuff that I'm listening to, or the prayers that I'm praying. It is very possible for us to worship God by ourselves, but it is not near as important as it is to worship God together as a congregation. Colossians 3 17 tells us that whatever we do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all. When the Bible says all, it means all the things, all the time, all everything you do. Do it for the glory of God. We can

worship God, bring him glory at work. We can do it at home. We can do it at school. We can do it in our vehicles, in the grocery store. Wherever we are, we can be glorifying God anywhere and everywhere you go. We should be the image bearing, gospel sharing, God glorifying worshipers of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Everywhere we go, we've got two more verses, and I'm gonna let you guys go. Philippians 2 9 through 11: God has exalted him, Jesus Christ, and bestowed on him the name that is above every. Name so that in the name of Jesus every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. And 1st Peter 2 4 through 5, as you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Our Christian life, the entirety of our Christian life, is for the glory of God. The eternity that we are going to spend is going to be spent glorifying God. Get your practice in now, because guess what? It's going to be a thousand times greater when we get to heaven. But in light of those two verses, if you haven't bowed your knee, if you haven't confessed Christ as the Lord of your life.

Invitation

Offering your life as a spiritual sacrifice to the service of God. Today could be the day. Join into the holy fellowship of believers and join us in worshiping the one true God. If you don't know what it looks like, come talk to somebody, please. Because to somebody on the outside, me talking about worship for the last however long it's been, they're going to be like, I just don't get it or that sounds weird. But if you know and you believe what God has done, if you know what God has done in your life, and you believe that, that, that He is worthy of all of our worship, then hopefully every bit of this was somewhat edifying to you. Our job is to do the things that we've been talking about the last few weeks. It's what I've been trying to with these couple series. That's what it's been. Is, is we are called to make disciples and we are called to glorify God. And both of those things go hand in hand. Both of those things require the other one, so we would be doing it.

Closing Prayer

Father, we thank you. Father, we thank you for your word. Father, we thank you for the the conviction of the Holy Spirit on us. I know this week has been a convicting week for me as I was writing this, Father, just just trying to truly understand what actual worship, what true and acceptable worship of you should look like, because Father, that is what we were created for. We were created to worship you. So Father, we we thank you for for our existence. Father, we thank you for for not giving up. We thank you for for the grace that you show each and every one of us every day, because Father, by the grace of God is the only reason that we are here today. So Father, let us in the smallest and the best

way that we can show, Father, it's not ever going to add up to what it needs to be, but Father, just let us with everything that we do let us worship you, because Father, you are deserving of every bit of it. Father, we also thank you for your Son. We thank you for the gift that that is, Father. We we we also, what sets us apart from from any other religion is, Father, we worship a living God, a true God. So Father, thank you for the gift of your Son. Thank you for his resurrection and thank you for the perfect and acceptable sacrifice that he was on our behalf, because we did not deserve it. Father, we ask all these things in your name. Amen.

Transcribed via Whisper (large-v3-turbo), punctuation/capitalization restored via local LLM pass -- please flag any mishearings for correction.