

Romans 11:33-36 (ESV)

³³ Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

³⁴ “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?”

³⁵ “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?”

³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

Romans 12:1-2 (ESV)

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.

² 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.

The Christian faith is most vibrant when it is counter-cultural. When true believers are going against the current of the spirit of the age, we’re doing something right.

When we blend in with the status quo, we’re probably doing something very wrong.

A disciple of JESUS Christ is not to conform to the pattern set by the unbelieving world.

What you believe should make a difference in how you live. That involves your worship, your lifestyle, and your thoughts. We are to be living sacrifices.

Three words are going to guide us through our passage this morning. **Doxology. Appeal. Transformation.**

We begin at the end of chapter 11. After dealing with the weighty issues of election, Israel and the Gentiles, Paul concludes with doxology.

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Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ³⁴ “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” ³⁵ “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?” ³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

Doxology. It comes from two Greek words “doxa,” which means glory, splendor, grandeur; and “logos,” which refers to the spoken word.

The simple definition of doxology **is a liturgical formula of praise to God. Doxology is our response to who God is and what He has done as Creator and Redeemer.**

There is substance Paul’s doxology. It has depth. It put into words that which came from the inner most part of his spirit. Doxology combines theological conviction with adoration and praise.

Doxology points us to the grandeur and glory of God with well thought out words.

Romans 11:33-36 (NIV)

³³ Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! ³⁴ "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" ³⁵ "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" ³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

Every word is meaningful in this doxology. They say that a picture is worth a thousand words. For the past couple of weeks I’ve been getting a steady stream of pictures from my wife Sandy who is out in Boston helping to take care of our grandson.

The pictures are adorable and I can’t get enough of them, especially the ones with our special needs daughter Margie who sings to him. It’s hard to put into words how much all that means to me.

Doxology puts into words what your heart desires to express to God. That’s what true worship is all about. We worship in spirit and in truth.

Some people say that you are what you eat. Others will say that you’re affected more by what you put into your mind rather than what you put into your stomach.

The premise of doxology is that you are what you worship; or your soul is shaped by that which you value above all else.

In that sense, everybody worships something. **Worship is the adoration that we have for that which we treasure most.**

Worship is the worth that we place on a person, place or thing which exceeds the value of everything else.

It really irks an atheist or agnostic to point out the fact that they too are worshippers. There is something that they value more than anything else.

It may be their reputation; their success; their possessions; their relationships or their comfort and pleasure.

Unbelievers often pride themselves in not bowing down to any deity, but in fact they do. They bow down to a god of their own making.

It is within our nature to be worshippers. We either worship the God who created and redeemed us, or we find a substitute for Him in the form of some kind of idol.

Worship is the adoration of that which we treasure most; it is the worth that we place on a person, place or thing that exceeds the value of everything else.

Our culture places a very high value on three major areas: power, money and sex. Most of us are affected by those enticements more than we realize. We worship that which we value most.

The worship of anything other than the living God is idolatry. John Calvin said that the human heart is an idol factory. Let me quickly list ten idols that can lead you away from the true worship of God.

1. I crave the approval of people more than I desire the approval of God.

2. I desire to be free from any kind of responsibility or burden, and I want this more than anything else.

3. I want to be so financially secure that I don't have to depend on anybody, even God.
4. I find my value affirmed most when someone is attracted to me. Without that kind of affirmation, I feel worthless.
5. I look to food, alcohol or some other kind of stimulus to give me the comfort and sense of well-being that I need. (and I turn to those things often)
6. My physical appearance is my most valued asset and my physical health is the most important component in my life.
7. I find that experience and pleasure is what defines the good life more than anything else.
8. I view personal autonomy as the essence of freedom; and submission, sacrifice and limits are the main source of frustrations and unhappiness.
9. I believe that all the benefits of heaven should be experienced here and now and anything that prevents that should be avoided at all costs.
10. Desires are meant to be fulfilled and we are the arbiters of how they are to be satisfied.

Each one of those statements points to an idol. Idols are those things which we value and worship more than God.

You say, "Come on, I'm human. I know that loving God above all else is what we ought to be doing, but there's a hundred more things that promise a quicker return."

Quicker isn't always better. A fast food meal can fill you up, but it can't satisfy a deeper hunger that you have.

We all have basically the same needs, but we seek to satisfy those needs in different ways.

We were created to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. When we seek to substitute anything in place of God, our ultimate needs will never be met.

Worship is an act of love, but we can love many things. The true worship of God comes from the spirit of God Himself, leading us to honor and esteem the Lord above all else.

William Temple

“Worship is the submission of all of our nature to God.

- It is the quickening of the conscience by his holiness;
- the nourishment of mind with his truth;
- the purifying of imagination by his beauty;
- the opening of the heart to his love;
- the surrender of the will to his purpose—
- all this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable.”

Paul’s doxology is followed by his appeal. Romans 12 begins the section of this epistle that goes from doctrine to application. There’s too much here to cover in this message so I’m just going to introduce this section today.

Romans 12:1 (ESV)

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.

The KJV says, “I beseech you, brethren...” The NIV says, “I urge to you...” I implore you. I strongly urge you.

This is a strong apostolic appeal. It's different from a command of God in which there can be no discussion. This is a plea from one believer to another for you to follow what God has made plain in His Word.

This is much of what preaching is. This is what God has said... now I urge you brothers and sisters to take heed to what God has given us.

I can do that by shouting and ranting; I can pronounce warnings and judgments; I can pound on the pulpit and shake my fist.

I would rather reason with you and seek to persuade. Threats and a flare for the dramatic doesn't have a lasting effect.

Isaiah 1:18-20 (NIV)

"Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.

If you are willing and obedient,
you will eat the best from the land;

but if you resist and rebel,
you will be devoured by the sword."
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Yes, there is the element of a threat and judgement there, but the underlying message of the Scriptures is: Trust in the Lord; don't rely on your own insight; do what is right; because everyone will reap what they sow.

So come now, let us reason together. You desire peace, joy, love and happiness. God wants to bless you with all of that and more. But that blessing comes when you trust Him enough to say, "Not my will, but Thy will be done."

I've been in the ministry long enough to know that you can't force people to do something they don't want to do or you can't stop people from doing what they have their minds set on; whether it's good or bad.

In matters of church discipline, elders and pastors do everything they can to reason with people.

If someone is living out of accord with the teachings of Scripture, as fellow sinners we appeal to them in love to be reconciled to God.

Church discipline isn't a power play, it's an appeal to be obedient to the Scriptures in light of the Gospel.

As a congregation, you will not often hear about what goes on behind the scenes. We plead with those who have gone astray.

Don't do that which is right in your own eyes. The world has its own way to deal with the struggles of life. We are to submit to Christ.

Tim Keller points out that millennials tend not to respond all that much to the "thou shall nots" in the Bible. But they seem to be more responsive to that which can be shown to be selfish.

Sin isn't just an outward action of breaking a command of God. Sin is the personification of self-centeredness. It's idolatry; it's self-worship.

At the very core of your being is the desire for autonomy; to call the shots and to do what you think you can get away with.

The human heart if left to its own desires will go its own way, do its own thing, and then blame God when things go bad.

Come now, let's reason together. I appeal to you out of the mercies of God to present your bodies to be a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to the LORD, which is your spiritual act of worship.

Romans 12:2 (ESV)

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.

Transformation takes place when the thoughts and intents of your heart are conformed not by the flesh, not by the spirit of the age, but by the Spirit of God.

We'll dive into this passage in more detail next week, but transformation takes place when you can see clearly the difference between God's ways and our ways.

Isaiah 55:6-9 (ESV)

"Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; ⁷ let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. ⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

I spent most of last week with our son in Dallas. For four days I lived the life of a Bachelor. His ways are not my ways. He has a very nice apartment with a very functional kitchen (but he doesn't use it).

He had no pots or pans; no cooking utensils; no toaster, no coffee maker. He eats a protein bar in the morning, and eats out for all his other meals. What good does it do you if you have a kitchen but you don't use it?

One trip to Target and about \$400 later, he had a functioning kitchen (which I suspect was his plan all along).

Will that change his lifestyle much? Probably not. He's going to continue to live the life of a bachelor until the LORD blesses him with a good Christian wife. (If you know anybody who's available, we're taking applicants)

A few outward or cosmetic changes doesn't make for transformation.

Transformation takes place when your world changes focus. Instead of everything revolving around yourself, Christ becomes the center.

Following Christ is a matter of the heart, it isn't just a matter of rote obedience and following the rules. Paul makes his appeal for transformation out of the mercy of God.

Mere obligation can determine what you do or don't do. Guilt may temporarily change behavior. But only grace and mercy can transform your heart.

The MERCY SEAT was a slab of pure gold which sat atop the ark of the covenant. On the Day of Atonement the high priest sprinkled the blood of a sacrificial lamb on the mercy seat as a plea for forgiveness for the sins of the nation.

The mercy seat anticipated the cross of Jesus Christ. There the blood of the lamb was shed to atone for your sin, and to deal with you in mercy and grace.

There's a wideness in God's mercy,
Like the wideness of the sea;
There's a kindness in his justice,
Which is more than liberty.

FREDERICK WILLIAM FABER (1814–1863)

Transformation takes place when you are motivated out of gratitude for what JESUS accomplished on the cross.

Redeemed, how I love to proclaim it!
Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb;
Redeemed through His infinite mercy,
His child, and forever I am.

Are you a child of God? Are you trusting Christ as your Savior and LORD?

As we prepare for the LORD'S Supper, let's sing this hymn written by Fanny Crosby and focus on transforming power of the Gospel.