

GROWING AS ONE

GOING TO MANY

REASONABLE WORSHIP



ROMANS CH. 12-13

Reasonable Worship

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Study 1 · Romans 12:1-8

Worshipping Together

We jump into the book of Romans at a significant turning point. Throughout chapters 1-11 Paul has outlined what Jesus won for us through his death and resurrection: The Christian can know forgiveness of sins, be restored as a child of God, be filled with God's Spirit, and share in an eternal hope that can never be taken away, all through faith in Jesus as Lord.

But from chapter 12, Paul starts to address how the gospel must impact the way Christians live. Given all that God has done for us in Christ, how should we respond? What is our 'reasonable worship' in light of God's goodness to us?

These are the questions we'll be asking in these studies: What sort of worship does God desire from the people he has sacrificed so much to save? And, for us at Central, how does our 2025 church theme, 'Growing as One, Going to Many', align with what God desires for his church here?



Thought Starter

1) What are some of the sacrifices people have made to help you become who you are today?

What response do you think those people were hoping for?

“ ”

*Oh, the depth of the riches of
the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgements,
And his paths beyond tracing out!
Who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counsellor?
Who has ever given to God that God should repay them?
For from him and through him and for him are all things.
To him be the glory forever! Amen.*

Romans 11:33-36

“ ”



Opening Prayer

The box above is the passage right before our passage today. Use Paul's expression of praise here, as the basis for your own prayer of praise as we come to look at the Word of God now.



Digging Deeper

2) Read verse 1.

Jesus came to fulfil (end) the Old Testament sacrificial system. As it says in Hebrews, “we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” (Hebrews 10:10)

If the sacrificial system has been fulfilled, why does Paul ask his readers to offer their bodies as a “living sacrifice”?

The Greek word *logicos* – found at the end of verse 1 and translated by the New International Version as “*true and proper*” – is usually translated as “*rational,*” “*reasonable,*” or “*spiritual.*”

To quote one commentator:

“...once you have a good view of God’s mercy, anything less than a total, complete sacrifice of yourself to God is completely irrational! If you give yourself partially or half-heartedly, you are simply not thinking; you are not looking at what Jesus did.”

Timothy Keller – *Romans 8-16 For You*

3) When you think about great worship, what comes to mind?

According to verse 1, what should characterise our worship?

4) Read verses 2.

Commentator Tom Wright says, "*Many Christians... hope they will be able to live up to something like Christian standards whilst still thinking the way the rest of the world thinks. It can't be done.*"

How can we limit the impact this world has on the way we think?

How can we renew our minds so that they're more and more aligned with God and his kingdom?

5) Many Bibles have a heading between verses 2 and 3. This makes sense, because verses 1-2 introduces what follows. However, verse 3 contains four words directly related to our minds. Clearly Paul has more to say on the way Christians should think.

Read verse 3.

The first thing Paul addresses is humility in the body of Christ. Why do you think he starts with this virtue in this context?

What would it look like if our church practiced this well?

6) Read verses 4-8.

What reasons are given for thinking of ourselves “with sober judgement?”

How could we respond to the person who insists, *‘It’s just me and Jesus. That’s enough. I can’t see the point of being involved in a church.’?*

7) Identify one gift you can use to serve the church, then complete the following sentence using the pattern from verses 6-8.

If my gift is _____, then _____.

Reflecting on that sentence, how would you rate your faithfulness?



Making It Real For Us

8) What, if anything, does this passage say to us as we seek to be 'Growing as One' this year?

What, if anything, does this passage say to us as we seek to be 'Going to Many' this year?

Christians can be grouped into two categories – marbles and grapes. Marbles are “single units that don’t affect each other except in collision.” Grapes, on the other hand, mingle juices: each one is a “part of the fragrance” of the church body.

The early Christians didn’t bounce around like loose marbles, ricocheting in all directions. Picture them as a cluster of ripe grapes, squeezed together by persecution, bleeding and mingling into one another.

Fellowship and worship, then, is genuine Christianity freely shared among God’s family members. It’s sad to think of how many Christians today are missing that kind of closeness. Sermons and songs, while uplifting and necessary, provide only a part of a vital church encounter. We need involvement with others too. If we roll in and out of church each week without acquiring a few grape juice stains, we really haven’t tasted the sweet wine of fellowship.

Anne Ortlund – Up with Worship

Making It Real For You

9) Given what this passage says about worship, how have you experienced great worship in our church?

What could you do to increase the volume of reasonable worship spilling out from our church?



Closing Prayer

Spend some time in quietness contemplating God's mercy and grace. (If you're in a small group, you might want to share the Lord's Supper amongst yourselves.)

Humble yourself before the Lord and, if you can, offer your body anew as a living sacrifice.

Ask God to show you how you can best build up his body, the church.

Pray for the Lord's good, pleasing, and perfect will to be accomplished in your life and the life of our church.

Praise God for his holiness, generosity, and love.

“ ”

Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? There are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So one hundred worshipers met together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be where they to become “unity” conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship.

A. W. Tozer – *The Pursuit of God*

“ ”

Study 2 · Romans 12:9-21

Overcoming Evil

Evil is a parasite: it feeds off the good. You can have good without evil, but evil only exists because it rots, ruins, and confuses the good, growing in size and impact as it does so. God is good and God's creation, uncorrupted by evil, is very good. Evil, at its core, involves the rejection of God along with his good will and created order.

Earlier in Romans, the Apostle Paul tells us that when we reject God we invoke his wrath and are handed over to what our evil heart's desire. (1:18-27) And so today, our world is overrun with evil and our hearts are inclined towards evil. We consistently ruin the good to serve ourselves, ignoring God. (1:28-32).

The good news of the gospel is that God has acted in his Son, Jesus, to defeat every evil power and restore to himself a people who are eager to do good. We can share in God's victory over evil through faith in Jesus as Lord and Saviour. (Romans 1-11)

In our last study, we saw how Paul calls upon believers to resist the evil patterns of this world and to be transformed: offering our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. This is our "reasonable worship". This is our calling as we unite with God in his purposes to overcome evil and do good.

If we're to be 'Growing as One, Going to Many', then our church must be actively engaged in overcoming evil as we passionately pursue the good.

But what is 'the good'? What does this look like in practical terms? What should we be doing to actively confront and overcome evil? These are the issues Paul addresses in our passage today.



Thought Starter

1) What's your favourite story about a conflict between good and evil? (e.g. Star Wars, Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter, etc.)

Why is this one your favourite?

Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.

Philippians 4:8



Opening Prayer

Dear Father,

Transform our minds so that we might better contemplate and pursue the things that are pleasing in your eyes. Give us insight as we study your Word to see the sins we need to repent of, and the virtues we need to embrace.

Amen



Digging Deeper

2) Paul wrote verses 9-13 as one long sentence centred around one subject – “*The love.*” Everything else here speaks to the expression of love as it’s worked out within Christian community.

Read verses 9-13.

What do these verses say about love in terms of our:

a) Relationship with God?

b) Relationships with one another?

3) What’s the starting point to overcome evil? (Verse 9)

How are you doing at that?

4) List the words or phrases in verses 9-13 that you think are particularly strong, active, or energetic.

As you assess your own witness and that of our church in light of this list, do you feel encouraged or discouraged (or both)?

What's one small step you can take to grow in one of these areas?

Xenophobia is an original Greek word that means 'fear of the stranger or outsider'. In ancient times its opposite would have been *philoxenia*, meaning 'love of strangers'. That's the word translated in verse 13 as *hospitality* by most English Bibles.

Is the practice of *philoxenia* how you usually understand hospitality?

"The home at the beginning of the twenty-first century has become a private possession, set up to serve the pleasure of the individual or the small family unit. Again, we need to be reminded that God has saved us to be members of a people, and that everything He gives us is to be used for the benefit of the whole body. True hospitality will involve opening our homes to others, not just for the showpiece dinner party, but also at times when people around us are in need."

St Helen's Bishopgate - *Read Mark Learn: Romans*

5) Verses 9-13 dealt with the inner life of the church. Paul now moves on to address what 'reasonable worship' might look like when it's practiced outside of the church.

Read verses 14-16.

Which of these statements do you consider to be the most countercultural and why?

Which of these statements do you think is the hardest to practice consistently in your own life and why?

Which of these statements do you think our church needs to hear the loudest and why?

Pause for a brief time of prayer over these matters

“ ”

Revenge keeps evil in circulation. Whether in a family or a town, or in an entire community like the Middle East or Northern Island, the culture of revenge, unless broken, is never ending.

Tom Wright - *Paul for Everyone: Romans 9-16*

“ ”

6) Evil is real and it impacts our lives, revenge is a natural response, justice should be done... but how should the 'reasonable worshipper' respond when the desire for revenge grips their soul?

Read verses 17-21, then answer.

How do you react when you think about these things and read this passage?

How are we to overcome evil?

What does it look like to practice that within the life of our church?

7) Step out of the passage for a moment and reflect on what Jesus did to overcome evil. Then consider how his example matches Paul's teaching in Romans 12:9-21. Jot down some notes to share with others.



Making It Real For Us

8) What, if anything, does this passage say to us as we seek to be 'Growing as One' this year?

What, if anything, does this passage say to us as we seek to be 'Going to Many' this year?



Making It Real For You

9) Re-read Romans 12:1-2.

Now choose three of Paul's instructions (one from verses 9-13, one from verses 14-16, and one from verses 17-21). Consider what it would take for these things to be part of your reasonable worship. Try to be as specific and practical as possible



Closing Prayer

Pray the following over your three answers from question 9.

Recognise God's holiness and Jesus' perfection as he lived in obedience to these three instructions.

Confess your shortfalls in these areas.

Thank God for the free forgiveness he offers in his Son.

Ask for strength to change so that you model these admonitions in your own life.

Finish by telling God that you want to change, and for that change to be an expression of your sincere worship in response to his greatness and glory.

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross

Colossians 2:13-15

The blood of Jesus has overcome both the evil in our own hearts and the cosmic forces of evil oppressing our world.

Victory belongs to the Lamb who was slain:

King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

What then, is our reasonable worship?

Study 3 · Romans 13:1-7

Worship in a World Ruled by Others

Jesus is head of the church and we must submit to him. This is an essential part of offering our bodies to him as a living sacrifice. (Romans 12:1) Paul goes on to say that our submission to Christ must first be demonstrated in our life together as Christians: We're to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Ephesians 4:21)

It's a beautiful picture – the church united, submitting to one another as one healthy body – but it's one that our sinful nature and different personalities make it very difficult to practice. Still, Paul makes it clear that this is a fitting response to God's love for us in Christ Jesus; that this is our 'reasonable worship'.

But what about the world? What about when we're surrounded by unbelievers who don't accept the values and teaching of Jesus? What about when we're ruled by authorities who are self-serving, who reject our faith, who perhaps even persecute our community? What does 'reasonable worship' look like then?

These were natural questions for the church in Rome to be asking when Paul wrote his letter to them. At that time, Nero was emperor. He believed he was god, he ruled harshly and recklessly, and he eventually began persecuting the Christians in Rome.

In our passage today, Paul instructs the church in what 'reasonable worship' should look like in a world ruled by others. His teaching is easy to understand, but hard to put into practice. Still, what Paul says here is our 'reasonable worship', It's an essential part of the church's call to be 'Growing as One, Going to Many'.



Thought Starter

1) What are some of the authorities we need to submit to in public life?

When do you find it hard to submit to these authorities? Why?

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honour the emperor.

1 Peter 2:13-17



Opening Prayer

Father God,

We want to do your will, even when it is hard, so please give us insight to see wisdom in your Word, and give us godly conviction and strength to apply it, especially when it goes against our nature.

Amen



Digging Deeper

2) Read verse 1-2.

What's the main instruction here?

Who does it apply to?

Does Paul allow for any exceptions here or throughout the rest of the passage?

As you read this teaching and think about the “governing authorities” in our world, how do you feel? What makes you react that way?

3) According to these verses, why should we submit to governing authorities?

What's the consequence for those who don't submit to them?

Why does this consequence apply?

4) Read verses 3-4.

According to these verses, why should we submit to governing authorities?

What are the consequences for obedience or disobedience?

How might this practically impact the 'reasonable worship' of our church?

“ ”

“Would you prefer bad government or no government, a bad schoolteacher or a class with no teacher at all, a bad boss or no boss? The answer is probably, ‘It depends how bad!’ Yes, but the general answer is that even fairly bad government is better than anarchy and the law of the jungle. Those of us who have only ever lived under stable and reasonably just government grumble about our governments. But we do not know... [the blessings we enjoy], by comparison to those who have lived through the total breakdown of civil order. It is a mark of the mercy of God that he governs the world by governments.”

Christopher Ash – *Teaching Romans Volume Two*

“ ”

5) In verse 5 Paul repeats his basic command and states two reasons for obeying it.

Read verse 5.

What two reasons does Paul give for submitting to authorities?

How do these reasons relate those he has already mentioned in verses 1-4?

6) At the time Paul wrote, there was significant disquiet (even rioting) within Roman society over the payment of certain taxes. No doubt these debates had an impact on the church in Rome who recognised Jesus, not Nero, as Lord. Paul now applies his teaching to specific practices and attitudes, including the payment of taxes.

Read verses 6-7.

How are these matters relevant to our relationship with 'governing authorities' today?

Are there any other practices or attitudes from our situation today that we should add to Paul's list in verse 7?

7) There's been lots of discussion on possible exceptions to these verses we've just looked at, however, Paul doesn't mention any here. Still, in a world of tyrannical and unjust governments, there must be some exceptions: Surely! For example, what if the government calls us to do something that goes against the kingdom of God?

Let's look at one time when this happened.¹ In the book of Acts we read how Peter and John healed a crippled beggar in Jesus' name and then preach the gospel to the gathered crowd. The religious authorities were upset and had Peter and John arrested and brought before the religious rulers.

Read Acts 4:18-30.

How are submission to authority and faithfulness to God demonstrated in this passage?

I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

1 Timothy 2:1-4

¹For other examples see Daniel 1:1-21, Daniel 3:1-30, Daniel 6:1-20, or the Lord Jesus on trial before his crucifixion in John 18:28-40.



Making It Real For Us

8) What, if anything, does this passage say to us as we seek to be 'Growing as One' this year?

What, if anything, does this passage say to us as we seek to be 'Going to Many' this year?



Making It Real For You

9) It is easy to talk about exceptions to Paul's teaching, but in most cases what he says should apply. What stops us/you wanting to submit to governing authorities?

How does your thinking or behaviour regarding the governing authorities need to change? (Perhaps review the answers you gave to question 1.)



Closing Prayers

Almighty God,

Ruler of the nations of the earth,

Give wisdom to King Charles; to the Prime Minister of Australia, Anthony Albanese; to the Premier of NSW, Chris Minns; to all Members of Parliament; and to all who hold office in this land.

May their decisions be based on wise counsel, so that peace and welfare, truth and justice would prevail among us; so that we might be a blessing to other nations, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen²

Almighty God,

Help us to obey your command to submit to our leaders and our government for your sake.

Help us to give honour and respect to our leaders – not just the ones we like, but even those we consider unreasonable or unprincipled.

Remind us that the governmental authorities that exist have been appointed by you, and that to resist our leaders is to oppose what you have set in place.

Help us to give respect to whom respect is due.

Amen³

² Taken from the Sydney Anglican - Book of Common Prayer

³ connectusfund.org/13-best-prayers-for-the-nation-and-its-leaders

“How clearly the Apostle insists on the Christian’s fulfilment of his duties to the state. They are truly an obligation as the most spiritual of our church functions. Paying taxes is just as Christian as praying at a meeting. It is the duty of faith to see God in these relationships, and we must take care that the duties to the State are made part of our Christian conduct.”

W. H. Griffith Thomas – *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*

Or to say it another way, submission to governmental authorities is an essential part of the Christian’s ‘reasonable worship’.

Study 4 · Romans 13:8-14

Our Debt to the World

The Westminster Shorter Catechism, written in 1647, begins with what may be the most famous line in Christian theology about the purpose of human existence.

“Q. What is the chief end of man?”

A. The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.”

That’s another way of saying that God gives us life and breath so that we can offer ourselves as living sacrifices in ‘reasonable worship’, both today and for all eternity.

In today’s passage, Paul draws attention to the highest and most demanding expression of ‘reasonable worship’ that we can offer, and he does so with his eye on eternity. We worship in this present age with our mind and hope set on the renewal of all things in the age to come.

When we live this way, we find that we have a debt we’ll never be able to pay off. Interestingly, though, in the kingdom of God this debt sets us free and gives us life. It’s a debt that every Christian and every church owes the world.



Thought Starter

1) What are some of the obligations people bear once they become a Christian?

Most people want to be free from obligations and debts. How do you feel about the obligations laid upon you as a Christian?

The Lord gave Moses 10 commandments on Mount Sinai: Four of them address our relationship with God, while six address our relationships with other people. There are a further 613 laws in the Old Testament: 248 of them are commands, while 365 are prohibitions.

One day a scribe approached Jesus and asked him which was the greatest commandment in the Law. There were a lot to choose from!

Jesus replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Matthew 22:37-40



Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We confess that your call to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice often feels like a burden greater than we can bear. But we know that everything you desire for us is for our good and your glory.

Help us to see your desires as we study your Word. Give us insight and lead us into the joy of obedience.

Amen



Digging Deeper

2) Christians are obliged to clear their debts, including those to the governing authorities (Romans 13:7). However, Paul now makes one exception.

Read verses 8-10.

What's the exception?

Who does it apply to? Is it just to those within the church, or is it broader than that?

3) In verse 9, Paul refers to four of the Ten Commandments. How will obedience to the law of love – “*Love your neighbour as yourself*” – lead to keeping each of the commandments he references?

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not murder

You shall not steal

You shall not covet

In some ways, it seems easy to apply the law of love in the examples above. In what less-obvious and perhaps more-challenging areas of life might it be harder to apply the law of love?

(For an example, see how Jesus applies this law in Matthew 5:21-40)

4) Re-read verses 8-10.

Then, mark each of the statements below as 'True', 'False', or 'Half-true'.

Then, explain your answers.

Love is... The Law

Love is... Fulfilment

Love is... Relational

Love is... A Debt

“ ”

“The rule for all of us is perfectly simple. Don't waste time bothering whether you “love” your neighbour; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him. If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more. If do him a good turn, you will find yourself disliking him less.”

C. S. Lewis – *Mere Christianity*

“ ”

5) Read verses 11-14.

Here Paul speaks about behaving “*as in the daytime.*” How does that relate to the law of love?

6) What does Paul mean when he says, “*The night is almost over. The day is almost here*”? (Verse 12)

How should we therefore be living?

7) In verse 13, Paul lists six deeds of darkness that must be discarded. We might think that we could discard them simply by doing more good deeds and working hard to be obedient to God’s law.

What’s the problem with this sort of thinking?
(See Romans 3:10-12 and 20, Philippians 3:4b-13)

How is it that we can actually discard these deeds of darkness, put on the armour of light and engage in 'reasonable worship'? (Verse 14)

How does this relate to where we started this study series, back in Romans 12:1-2?

Making It Real For Us

8) What, if anything, does this passage say to us as we seek to be 'Growing as One' this year?

What, if anything, does this passage say to us as we seek to be 'Going to Many' this year?



Making It Real For You

9) We owe the world a debt, for the entire law of God is fulfilled in one command, “Love your neighbour as yourself.” Jesus told a parable about this command, The Parable of the Good Samaritan. (Luke 10:25-27)

As you think about all the people in your life, who do you find it hard to see as ‘your neighbour’?

How can you better worship God through your relationship with this person (or people)?

Let’s change the focus and think about our church: Who is our ‘neighbour’?

How might that impact the shape of our ‘reasonable worship’?



Closing Prayer

Confess the ways you have failed to show love and have instead practiced deeds of darkness.

Pray for God's Spirit to strengthen you so that you can practice the law of love in all things.

Ask that our church might be known for our love for one another and for how our love overflows into the world.

Renew your commitment to being clothed with the Lord Jesus Christ and ask that the Holy Spirit would continue to renew your mind and enable you to stop thinking about how to gratify the desires of your flesh.

Pray, 'Come, Lord Jesus!' as you praise God and set your hope on the renewal of all things.

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible – and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. This is why it is said:

*'Wake up, sleeper,
rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.'*

Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

Ephesians 5:8-17

A healthy body will walk confidently in the light without any fear or shame. This is our reasonable worship.

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