



Fall Bible Memorization Project

Introduction

As we study God's Word it is always interesting to look at the different Bible translations. In doing so we get a fuller meaning that can broaden our scope of understanding. I know that many of us are memorizing from different versions so I will use several different ones as I share with you today. In Romans 12:1 Paul begins with the words, "I urge you".

Some versions say, "I beseech you..."

Some say, "I beg you..."

Some say, "I call upon you..."

And in the Message Bible it simply says, "Now here is what I want you to do..."

Whatever way you say it I think the memo is clear, Paul is passionately prodding us. So what is he prodding us to do? Worship! Many a believer walks through the doors of their church each Sunday to worship God. As they do, all kinds of standards and expectations come into play. Think for a minute about the things that you experience and expect from yourself and from the leadership as you go to "worship" each week. These could be some of the standards and rules of "worship" in your life and in your church. But the real question is "why" are we "worshipping"?

Looking at the Verse

Romans 12:1 is about worship but Romans chapter 11 is too! In Romans 11 Paul spends some time discussing Jews and Gentiles and their spoiled worship relationship with God. He describes their misunderstandings and their shortcomings but he points out that God has never abandoned either group because of His love and mercy. He describes how God reached out even though they had allowed themselves to be distracted from Him as they walked through ceremonial worship exercises. I want my worship to mean something, to make a difference, to be real. I am sure you feel the same way. I don't want the stale and lifeless rituals that the Israelites experienced. So when Paul starts prodding, I start listening! I know he must have something important to show me. In Romans 12:1 he describes the worship that we can experience in view of God's mercy compared to the stale and lifeless worship described in Romans chapter 11. Let's take a look.

Both the Israelites and the Gentiles were familiar with worship offerings. In each of their worship practices, offerings of animal sacrifices, gifts, and all manner of things were often presented on an altar. I often wonder how the people felt after they went to the temple to worship God with their animal sacrifices. Did they sense His presence? Did they know God's power? According to Paul's description I don't think so. Even though they were going through the motions, their worship had become wooden, lacking life. Offering anything on the altar should have been a symbol of what was really going on in one's heart but instead it had become a ritual, a ceremony that was a rule to follow. If you followed the rule well, you could pat yourself on the back and know you had done your duty. But what about knowing God in the day to day living, what about sensing His power and walking in His ways when you ate and worked and shared relationships with others. For the Israelites, it was easy to look like a worshipper on the outside but God could see their hearts and they were sorely lacking.

Paul understood all too well as he had experienced the same thing, but through God's mercy, Paul had found the heart of expressing his worship to God. He says it in Romans 12:1, ***"Therefore I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship."***

Paul is urging, God has been so merciful, so please let's make sure our worship is real! In Romans 11 it is clear that something was missing. There was plenty of activity going on but what was at the center of it, what motivated it? God had a plan when He created the idea of sacrifice. The sacrifice of animals would point to the sacrifice of Christ. Because of the complete sacrifice of Christ, there was no longer a need for animal sacrifices but there was still a great need for us to

worship with sacrifice. So Paul instructs us how. Paul says *"in view of God's mercy, offer your bodies as living sacrifices"*. He pleads with us to sacrifice our ways of doing things, our own choices and thoughts and our preferences in order to line them up with God's ways. We sacrifice ourselves! Paul says, this is how you worship!

I love how the Message Bible puts it. It says, *"So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for Him."*

And So...

As we memorize this week, here is the question for us. Are we living in Romans 11 or 12? Is our worship composed of activity and a ceremony we attend or is our worship a giving of all we are in every moment life? Romans 12:1 offers the definition of worship for the Christian. It says, *"in view of God's mercy, offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship."* Whenever you give up self and lift up God, you are worshipping! You may be sitting in a meeting at work, riding down the road in your car, singing in church, struggling through homework, helping around the house or sitting in a practice to participate in. No matter where you are stuff is going on in your heart that only you know. We have hundreds of opportunities daily to give ourselves over to God's ways, sacrificing ourselves. Every time we do, it is worship! It is lifting God above ourselves. This kind of living is God-honoring and life-giving!

Why would Paul beg? Why would Paul plead? I believe it is because Paul himself was at one time so caught up in wrong thinking about worship. He followed the ceremonial rules to the smallest detail, but in so doing he was worshipping himself. His motive for following the rules was all about himself so that he could say, "Look what I am doing and you should do it like me!" In all his zeal for what he believed to be "worship" he had missed the whole point. He had missed the point of knowing God, of living his life for God moment by moment. He could meet the expectations of the religious crowd but God himself was not the focus. He was a highly religious man living for himself and he was miserable! Now, God's mercy had rescued him and shown him the Truth and he is begging and pleading and urging us to see worship for what it really is too because he knows personally how empty religious activity can be when that is all it is.

When our aim is to follow worship rules and be involved in religious activity our worship experience is almost certain to become empty. But when our aim is to say, "Here I am God, you can have all of me, every minute, every day, for whatever purpose you would have for me" we enter into a place of living as a worshipper and it makes all the difference. It invades our whole life!

When Paul started to live that way, his life took on a whole new zeal and purpose and we see that played out all over the New Testament. Because of God's mercy, God had shown him a better way to worship. He showed him a way to worship that moved him into a strong and real relationship with Almighty God. And so... Paul is passionately prodding us to do the same, in view of God's mercy to participate in worship that is real!

As we enter this time of memorization, I think God wants us to anticipate a greater level of worship in our lives. As we lift Him up in our *"sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life"* He can become a part of all that we are and He can bring a level of "life" into our lives that is beyond our comprehension. It is moment by moment worshipping of Almighty God and it is a great way to live!

Consider:

...your own daily worship experiences. How have you offered yourself as a living sacrifice today?
...is there any part of your "religious activity" that needs a "reality" check?

Pray

Romans 12:1 "Dear God, in view of God's mercy, I will offer myself as a living sacrifice to you..."