



Living Sacrifices: A Study on Worship

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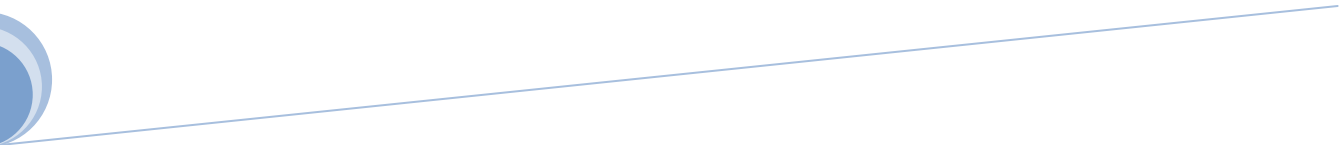
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Introduction

As the basis of our study, we are looking at the *Smaller Westminster Catechism's* first question which states, "What is the chief end of man?" The answer to this question tells us that we are to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. That is what this series of studies is meant to do; it's meant to teach us basic principles that show how we can glorify God with our lives. To this point, we have already looked at the first two parts of our series. In our opening study, we looked at [A Heart to Study God's Word](#), which looked at the reasons why we should have a desire to study the Word of God and the steps required in order to make it a part of our everyday lives. From there, we moved on to [Prayer God's Way](#), a study on the what, when, and how of prayer using the disciple's prayer from [Matthew 6](#). Our teaching for today is on the subject of worship, the third part of this series.

Like we have in previous studies, we should begin our study by defining what worship is. It doesn't make any sense for us to study a topic without first understanding what it is that we're talking about. Let's define worship. *The American Heritage Dictionary* defines worship as the following: the reverent love and devotion accorded a deity, as well as the ceremonies, prayers or other religious forms by which this love is expressed. *Easton's Illustrated Dictionary* defines worship as "homage rendered to God which it is sinful (idolatry) to render to any created being." While the *Holman Bible Dictionary* defines worship to be the "human response to the perceived presence of the divine, a presence which transcends normal human activity and is holy." So, if we're going to give ourselves a definition to work with, we could say that worship is the love and devotion that we show towards God as we perceive His presence in our lives. Our study will further refine this definition as we dive into the text of Scripture.

Let us now begin to look at the subject matter, beginning with a look at some of the common misconceptions of what worship is.

Misconceptions of Worship

When you hear the word worship, what comes to mind? What do you immediately think of? It's probably pretty safe to say that most people's answers have absolutely nothing to do with what true worship entails.

When most people hear worship, they almost instinctively think of music and its varying styles, especially in Christian circles. In the current culture of Christianity, styles of music have almost become synonymous with the word worship. This becomes clearly evident when you go to your local Christian bookstore and visit the music section; there you will likely find a large selection of music that is labeled "worship music." These styles of music are then used to put people in a state where they feel that they're in the presence of God and that they are worshipping Him. We could of course get into a discussion on the content of this music and the amounts of doctrine contained therein, but that is a topic for another day. As a whole, this is not what true worship is. In a lot of ways, yes, worship can involve music, but music alone is not

worship. We don't "enter in" to worship just because we have the right kind of music or atmosphere; worship is something that is much deeper than that.

Now, there are other people who think that we worship God by simply going to church on Sundays. These people feel that if they are a church member and attend service once or twice a week then they have worshipped God. This is not the case either; simply being a member or attending church does not constitute worship. A church service is an event where the corporate worship of the Lord takes place, but that is not the only venue where worship can take place. As we will find out, worship is something that we should be doing wherever we go, and not just with a group of other like minded believers. Again, worship is something that is much deeper than a service or two during the week.

Of course, there are any number of other misconceptions about worship, but the bottom line is that they all pale into comparison to what true worship is and entails. Once we reach the end of this study you will know what it means to truly worship God, and you will see just how shallow many of these misconceptions are when compared to the reality of what true worship is all about.

The Elements of Worship

What is Worship?

In doing a study on the topic of worship, there are many angles from which we could approach the subject and a great number of passages from which we can choose. For this particular study, there is one Bible passage in particular that we want to focus the majority of our attention on: [Romans 12:1-2](#). It is here that we find the Apostle Paul giving us a very clear and life altering description of what true worship is, along with instructions for how we are to worship. Let us begin by reading the passage:

[Romans 12:1-2 \(NASB\)](#) - 1Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. 2And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

To begin, we want to key in on the phrase "your spiritual service of worship." From these words alone we can come away with a significant understanding of what it means to worship the Lord Most High. The first thing that we notice in this phrase is the word "spiritual." This tells us that worship is not merely some physical activity, but it is something that involves the spirit of man. Being that God is spirit, it would be logical that the mode in which we worship Him would be by spirit also. Speaking of logic, the word used here for "spiritual" is the word λογικός (*logikos*, Strong's #G3050), which can also be translated "reasonable" or "rational." This gives us further insight into the mode of worship. Worship is something that comes from the



spirit, and it is also something that originates in the reason or intellect of a person. What does this mean? Well, it implies that the mind is actively involved in the act of worship and that worship is not merely some mindless activity by which we let our emotions take over completely. This also means that worship is something that is internal, as opposed to external; we will develop this concept later on in our study.

Now, there are numerous words in the New Testament that are used for worship with *προσκυνέω* (*proskuneo*, Strong's #G4352) being the most common. The word used in this passage is not one of the more common ones, but the meaning that this particular word carries is vital for helping us to understand what kind of worship God wants from His people. The word that Paul uses here for worship is *λατρεία* (*latreia*, Strong's #G2999), which constitutes a religious worship and is a word that is used for priestly or temple activities. *λατρεία* is only used a total of 5 times in the Greek New Testament, and each time it implies giving some kind of ritual service unto God. The other passages in which this word appears include: [John 16:2](#); [Romans 9:4](#); and [Hebrews 9:1, 6](#). A look at these passages is out of the scope of this study, but the picture is made clear when reading these verses, that this kind of worship is intended to be an act of praise rendered unto God.

The Knowledge Factor

Our next point ties right into our previous one, which is that knowledge of God and the Bible are requirements for worship. We have already stated that worship is both "spiritual" and "logical," which means that there has to be something there for our mind and spirit to be focused on. So, where do we get this knowledge? This is the question that we need to answer next.

I remember watching the G.I. Joe cartoon when I was younger and at the end of every episode they would have a public service announcement or moral message that always ended with the slogan, "and knowing is half the battle." Well, that holds true here too; knowledge of God is half of what you need for worship. As we learned in our first study, one of the reasons we study the Bible is so that we can know more about God; and, one of the reasons we need to know as much as we can about God is because we need that knowledge in order to know how to worship Him. Just like with most things in life, you only get out what you put into it; therefore, you're only going to get out of worship what you bring to the table. If you only know very little about the Lord, then you will only have that much substance to worship Him with. On the other hand, if you spend a significant amount of time studying the Bible and praying to God, you're going to have a wealth of knowledge about Him, and then be able to use that knowledge in your worship.

Now, knowledge alone isn't enough; you need to also know that your knowledge is the truth. There are many people and religions parading around saying that they know God and have His truth, but most are boasting in a lie. As a matter of fact, if it's not coming from the Bible then it is not God's truth. If we turn to [John 4:20-24](#), we can see an illustration from Scripture that shows us just how important it is to have truth coupled with your worship. In this

passage, we find Jesus at the well speaking with the Samaritan woman; and, it is with this set of verses that the conversation between the two gets interesting as the truth of Scripture comes heavily into play.

[John 4:20-24 \(NASB\)](#) - 20"Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you *people* say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." 21Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. 22"You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23"But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. 24"God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

In [verse 20](#), we find the Samaritan woman stating that her people worship on "this mountain" (Mt. Gerizim), while the Jews say Jerusalem is the location at which God is to be worshiped. Before we go any further in this conversation, let's first get a bit of background information so that we can know what this woman at the well is talking about. First, both Jews and Samaritans (a race that was half-Jew and half-Gentile) knew that God had commanded their forefathers to identify a place for their worship of Him ([Deut. 12:5](#)). With the Samaritans only recognizing the Pentateuch, they looked at how Abraham built an altar to God at Shechem ([Gen. 12:6, 7](#)), which was near Mt. Gerizim, where the Israelites shouted the blessings promised to them by God before entering the Promised Land ([Deut. 11:29, 30](#)). With that as their foundation, the Samaritans chose Mt. Gerizim as the location to build their temple. To the contrary, the Jews recognized the entire Hebrew canon of Scripture available to them at that time and chose Jerusalem as their place of worship ([2 Sam. 7:5-13](#); [2 Chr. 6:6](#)) because further revelation had revealed that to them. So, getting back to our text, recognizing that this man (Jesus) was a prophet, she wanted to know the truth of where they were to worship.

Jesus answers her in the following verses ([vv. 21-24](#)). In answering her, He first states that a time is coming when there would no longer be need for a physical location in which to worship God; so, neither Mt. Gerizim nor Jerusalem would be a required place for worshipping God ([v. 21](#)). He then begins to get into the importance of truth in worship with [verse 22](#) where He states, "You worship what you do not know." It is here that Jesus is pointing out the lack of truth that the Samaritans have because they only regard the books of Moses as revelation from God; as a result of this, the Samaritans did not have the full revelation of God, therefore only having a part of the truth. Without full disclosure of the truth, they were only able to worship God in as much as they knew, even though God had revealed more of Himself to His people. It was for this reason that they did not know that the temple was to be in Jerusalem. He continues, "We worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews." Here, Jesus is telling this woman that the Jews have the full revelation of God (to that point), thus they fully knew the God they worshiped.

What importance does knowing the full truth play? Well, just imagine for a moment that I'm giving you directions to my house. What would happen if I started out giving you turn-by-



turn instructions on how to get to my house, but then just decide to stop giving you directions halfway? You'd probably end up lost, not knowing where to go, right? Or think about truth and lies; 99% truth and 1% lie still equals 100% lie, no matter how much truth is thrown in there. This is the picture here with the Samaritans; they didn't have the full details, so they weren't able to know how to fully and properly worship the Lord.

Getting back to our text, we see in [verse 23](#) that Jesus comes back to clarify His first statement that an hour is coming by telling this Samaritan woman that the time is not just coming some time in the future, but it's here right now. And with that, He goes on to say that because the time is now here, God is desiring for people who will worship Him in spirit and in the full disclosure of His truth. In other words, Jesus is telling her that she has to know God in as much as He has revealed Himself and do so in her spirit, instead of at a physical location.

He then goes on to say in [verse 24](#) that "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." What's the big deal about worshipping in spirit and truth? Well, first and foremost, the nature of God is that He is Spirit; in essence, it means that His nature is invisible to the physical world. We can see this illustrated to us in passages such as [Col. 1:15](#); [1 Tim. 1:17](#); and [Heb. 11:27](#). Secondly, let's go back to Jesus' comparison between Jews and Samaritans. As far as the Samaritans were concerned, even in their lack of truth, they still had a zeal for worshipping God and put their all into worshipping Him. To the contrary, the Jews had the full disclosure of God's truth, but their heart was elsewhere; many Jews simply did their ritual service to God out of obligation, instead of actively making their inward man a part of the worship experience. Hence, we must worship God inwardly with a proper heart attitude, and not merely have external compliance to rituals and laws. What's more, Jesus tells us that we "must worship," which implies the absolute necessity for worship to be done in this manner. No longer are we worshipping God ritually because we have to, but we're now doing it because we want to, and doing so wherever we go.

Finally, our worship must be consistent with the Word of God (the knowledge) and centered on Jesus Christ, who is our access to the Father ([John 14:6](#)). It is for this reason right here that sets Jews and Christians apart and why it is important to recognize the entire canon of Scripture as the Word of God. Without the New Testament, we would not know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that our access to God is through Him; we also wouldn't know that our worship is supposed to be directed at the Son. This is why worshipping God in both spirit and truth is so important. If you don't know the truth, then your worship of God will be in error; or, you may not even be worshipping God at all.

Motivation for Worship

Now that we know that we need to know the Bible in order to know how to worship, what then should motivate us to want to worship God? Well, Scripture alone should give us motivation enough to worship God, but let us go back to our main text and see what Paul has to say regarding our motivation for worship.

In [Romans 12:1](#) Paul begins by saying, "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God..." The Apostle Paul gives us our motivation right there in the opening of the chapter; the mercies of God are to be our motivation! Our motivation for worship is to be based primarily upon the mercies of God. And it's worth noting that Paul isn't just speaking of one mercy, but it's the mercies of God plural.

So, you're probably asking yourself, "What are the mercies of God and what's that all about?" Well, very simply, everything that we have been given from God can be considered a mercy. But, let's take a look at the text a bit because the very first word of [Rom. 12:1](#) demands that we do some further investigation. The verse starts off with a "therefore," and the astute student of the Bible has to ask himself, "What is it there for?" In order to do that, we need to back up to the closing verses of [chapter 11](#), which will tell us what the "therefore" is referring to. Beginning with [verse 33](#), it reads:

[Romans 11:33-36 \(NASB\)](#) - 33Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! 34For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? 35Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? 36For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen.

Here we find an absolute outburst of praise to God! After writing eleven chapters of weighty doctrine, Paul can't help but to glory in the depth and riches that come from knowing God and His Word. He is able to praise God for His infinite knowledge and wisdom; he is even able to praise Him for being the sustainer of everything; all of which Paul did not deserve. That's a thing to note about mercies; a mercy is something that we do *not* deserve; yet, everything that God has given us is a mercy because we don't deserve any of it. If you look back at these first eleven chapters of Romans, you could say that they sum up the mercies (plural), which includes a whole wealth of undeserved goodness. A small list of those mercies would include: eternal love, eternal grace, the Holy Spirit, forgiveness, reconciliation, eternal life, and the list goes on from there. This is why Paul is so full of worship and praise; he recognizes that all he has is a mercy given to him by God. The same thing should motivate us; we should be so overwhelmed with God's mercies that we're bubbling over wanting to worship Him. Also, this is not the only place where we find Paul having these kinds of doxological outbursts, as he does it in several other epistles, such as at the end of Romans in [16:25-27](#); [Ephesians 3:20, 21](#); [Philippians 4:19, 20](#); and [1 Timothy 1:13-17](#). The point here is that worship comes from and is motivated by a heart that is completely saturated with the mercies of God that come as a result of the cross and work of Jesus Christ.

Logically, if the mercies of God are to be our motivation for worship, then what should our response be to those mercies? This is a question that the Psalmist asks in [Psalm 116:12](#) when he states, "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me?" Indeed, this is the question that we need to ask ourselves after examining the mercies of God; what are we going to do as a result of all that God has done for us?

The latter half of [Romans 12:1](#) tells us what our response should be to the mercies of God; we are to present our bodies as living and holy sacrifices unto God. It then goes on to state that this is our "spiritual/reasonable/rational service of worship." In layman's terms, when we think about salvation and all the other mercies of God, we should be overwhelmingly moved and motivated to worship God with all of our being. Truly, it is a sincere grasp of salvation's richness and depth that produces true worship in the life of a believer. If you don't have an understanding of the depths of Jesus' work on the cross, then you're going to have a difficult time finding reason to worship God. For the new believer, at the very least they have the knowledge that they've been saved from hell and can utilize that as a foundation upon which to build, but it should by no means remain at that level.

How Do We Worship?

Once we know what motivates and fuels our worship, we then have to ask ourselves, "how do we worship?" Our response to the mercies of God is the same way in which we worship Him, we present our bodies as living and holy sacrifices unto God ([Rom. 12:1](#)). What exactly does this mean though? Well, you can view this as offering your whole life in worship as a way of life, as opposed to something you only do on certain occasions or at a specific locale. It means that you bring your body into subjection and allow it to be put under the authority and direction of the Holy Spirit. Paul, in [1 Corinthians 9:24-27](#), gives us a very clear indication of what it looks like to bring our bodies under subjection as it relates to self discipline. This is true for worship because it requires a certain level of discipline to deny the flesh and submit to the Lord.

Now, what is so interesting about presenting your body as a living sacrifice? Well, first of all, Paul is incorporating slave language into the passage. If you flip back half a dozen chapters to [Romans 6:13-16](#), you will see Paul using similar language when instructing the Romans to no longer be slaves to sin and the flesh, but to be slaves of God and righteousness. It makes perfect sense when you think about it, because you are literally under the influence of whomever you give control of your life to, whether it be to the flesh or to God. Our passage has a much greater context than just slave language, as it also contains priestly and temple language as we noted earlier with *λατρεία*.

To help us further understand what it means to present our bodies as living sacrifices, let's look at some more vocabulary. This time, we want to point our attention to the word "present," which is the Greek word *παρίστημι* (*paristemi*, Strong's #G3936). This is a temple and Levitical term meaning to put on the altar, or die to one's own agenda. In this context, it means that we are putting our lives on the altar, giving it up in every sense imaginable. In essence, we're saying that we are ready to be killed and burned as a sacrifice to God. Of course common sense tells us that God doesn't want us killing ourselves as a means of worshiping Him, especially when you take into account that the text says we are to be "living" sacrifices. This means that we are dealing with Old Testament language and symbolism that has been brought forward to the Church Age as a means of illustration; in doing so, Paul is pointing to the temple system of sacrifice in order to show its parallel to the Christian life.

What did the temple system look like? Well, you would have to read most of the book of Leviticus in order to understand the full sacrificial system, but we're going to generalize things for this study, although it is a worthwhile read when time permits. In order to present a sacrifice under the Mosaic Law, you had to slit the throat of an animal (i.e. a sheep or goat) and then lay it on the altar to be burned as an offering unto the Lord. In order to worship God under that system, and to be cleansed of sin, it required the death of a substitutionary sacrifice; something had to die. This is no longer the case today, though, as God no longer wants dead offerings, but only living ones. God now desires living sacrifices that are willing to *παρίστημι* (present) themselves to God and deny their own agendas to follow wholeheartedly after God as a way of life.

How did this change happen though? Why does God no longer require the sacrifice of animals? [Hebrews 9-10](#) sums this up for us perfectly. In this passage of Scripture we are given the exact method by which God's Law was fulfilled once and for all through the singular sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which subsequently gave each and every one of us access to God the Father. It was because Jesus was the perfect sacrifice that we no longer have to offer up sheep and goats on an altar; we can now metaphorically put ourselves on the altar and serve God with our lives. To fully understand this process, a thorough study on [Hebrews 9-10](#) is highly recommended, as it explains how and why we are able to worship in the manner that we are.

Overall, when you present your body as a living sacrifice unto God, your life becomes a perpetual offering, which turns worship into a 24/7 experience where you hold absolutely nothing back. This is what true worship is; it is a life that is dedicated and submitted to living out the Scriptures in a manner that is pleasing to God and motivated by His abundant mercies.

How Do We Get There?

Now, it's all good knowing what true worship is supposed to look like, but there is still some wiggle room left to fill. How do we actually get to that point? Of course we know what it means to be a living sacrifice, but how do we do it? How do we get there?!

Our answer takes us back to the mercies of God. We obtain the mindset of worship when we understand the mercies of God. That still isn't a lot of detail, though, which is why Paul continues in [Romans 12:2](#) with applicable instruction on how to make worship a reality in our lives. We are told that this happens through the renewing of our minds. You see, one of the main things that prevents us from worshiping God is that we don't have the right mindset, even as believers. Being birthed into this fallen world, we have become accustomed to its ways of thinking, and it has shaped how we live, act, and think. We naturally do things in a worldly manner without giving it a second thought. We can no longer live in this way, which is why we are told by Paul that we need to renew our minds and take on a new way of thinking.

In order to renew our minds, there is a process that we need to go through. The first thing we have to do is stop allowing ourselves to be conformed by the world. The word "conformed" is the Greek word *συσχηματίζω* (*suschematizo*, Strong's #G4964) and it is a present

passive plural imperative. What does that mean? With the word being passive, it indicates that you are allowing yourself to be molded and shaped by the world; furthermore, you're not the one doing the molding, but it's the world that is molding you. With that in view, Paul is commanding you to literally stop allowing yourself to be molded by the world's fallen and corrupt ways of thinking. As Christians, we are to despise this kind of thought pattern, as we are told in [1 John 2:15](#) and [James 4:4](#). Simply put, don't think or act like the world! This is the initial step in renewing your mind; you have to first stop the flow of information that is contrary to the ways of God.

Once you have put an end to the world's influence in your life, you can then move on to the second and most important step, which is to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Again, a look at the Greek will help us to better understand what it is that we're supposed to do when we renew our minds. We first want to look at the word "transformed." The word that Paul uses for "transformed" is μεταμορφώω (*metamorphoō*, Strong's #G3339), and it means to allow yourself to be constantly being transformed. Just like συσχηματίζω, μεταμορφώω is a present passive plural imperative, which means that you are not the one performing the work, but you're allowing the Holy Spirit to do the transforming of your mind. μεταμορφώω is also used in [2 Cor. 3:18](#), which is a passage that gives us a better picture of what we should be allowing ourselves to be transformed into. In 2 Corinthians, along with [Rom. 12:2](#), Paul is showing us that we should be allowing ourselves to be transformed into the likeness of Christ; indeed, this is God molding us into His very image.

How does this transformation take place? It happens when we renew our minds. Now look, this has nothing to do with emotion or feelings. This is a renewing of the mind, which is your understanding and reason, where you think; it's all about the mind. So, when we are talking about renewing our minds, we are talking about a complete renovation of thought (*ἀνακαίνωσις*, *anakainōsis*, Strong's #G342). We are removing the world's system of thinking and replacing it with the things of Christ; at its most basic level, we want to think the same way God thinks. The great part about thinking like God thinks is that it's absolutely possible, at least for a believer. God has revealed Himself in Scripture; and, in so much as He has disclosed Himself, we are able to know Him and how He thinks. [1 Corinthians 2:16](#) makes this evident to us when Paul states that "we have the mind of Christ." We also have the Holy Spirit who is able to reveal and teach those things to us, as we see a few verses up ([1 Cor. 2:10-13](#)).

In putting off the ways of the world and replacing our current thought pattern with that of God's, we are putting ourselves in a position to truly worship God and to prove His will, which is good, acceptable, and perfect. But even with all of that, there is still one thing that we have failed to look at, and that is the source of worship.

What is the Source of Worship?

The final element of worship that we want to look at is its source. From what we've studied thus far, we know what should motivate us, what's required, and how we are to worship; but, we don't know what our source for worship is. So, what is our source of worship?

Our answer is that it's the truth of the Word of God. This answer brings this study full circle because it takes us back to the fact that knowledge is required to worship God. Just as we have to worship in spirit and truth, we can only gain that truth through in-depth study of God's Word, the Holy Bible, as well as coupling it with prayer. As we have already stated, it is impossible to worship God without a knowledge of His Word; well, it is also impossible to renew your mind and enter in to a lifestyle of worship if you don't have a source by which you are renewing your mind.

This is why we started off this four part series with an emphasis on the Bible; if you don't first have a passion and desire for reading, studying, and understanding the Word of God then you will never be able to worship effectively. Our worship is fueled by our knowledge of God and His Word. Without that desire for learning the Scriptures and having it as a source of worship, we will never know what the mercies of God are, let alone even begin to be motivated by them. We will also not have the wisdom necessary to have your mind transformed and molded into the likeness of God. This is why passages like [Colossians 1:9-10](#) are so important and encouraging for the believer; this passage shows how Paul did not cease to pray for the Colossians and prayed that their knowledge of God would grow. He did this because he knew that it would have a direct reflection on the manner in which they walked and served God; the same is true for believers today.

As a means of summing this up and putting it into a small nugget, we can say that conviction is followed by affection. As we study the Word of God, it convicts and motivates us; and, a natural outpouring of that results in an endearing affection for God and wanting to worship Him with our lives. That's what true worship is all about, and that's how we should be living our lives on a daily basis. Worship stems from a passion for God and His Word, and the more Word and doctrine we have in us, the easier it is for us to worship Him. So, with that, dig into your Bible, get your spiritual weight up, and become a living sacrifice that is holy and acceptable in God's sight. Amen.