

Colossians 3 ¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

¹⁸ Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.

²⁰ Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

²¹ Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.

²² Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favour, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, ²⁴ since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. .

John 4 ¹⁹ 'Sir,' the woman said, 'I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem. ²¹ 'Woman,' Jesus replied, 'believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in the Spirit and in truth. ²⁵ The woman said, 'I know that Messiah' (called Christ) 'is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us. ²⁶ Then Jesus declared, 'I, the one speaking to you – I am he.'

Whole life worship. What does *worship* mean to you? Maybe Sunday worship, morning worship, going to church, singing, praying, listening to the sermon, taking communion. Maybe that part of a service or meeting where we focus our hearts on God in music, song and prayer. *Now we are going to have a time of worship.*

Maybe people prostrating themselves before God *bowing down and worshipping.*

The woman at the well said to Jesus: ²⁰ *Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.'*

Her focus was on what one might call *religious worship* – on the importance of place and style and ritual. When you meet someone and discover they are a Christian, do you ever ask them *Where do you worship?* And depending on their answer, you might well judge what kind of Christian they are! *I worship at the Cathedral, WBC, Ridgeway, St John's Roman Catholic Church, the Quakers, the Brethren church in Brightwell.* Note how Jesus immediately responds: *'Woman, believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.'*

In other words: **None** of that stuff – where or how or what ritual you use – matters.

Jesus says only two things really matter.

1. That the worshipper really knows God. *You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know.* How do we know God? Jesus says: *salvation is from the Jews.*

God is the God who has revealed himself to the world through the Jewish Scriptures and through his dealing with the Jews through history. And now we can say through the culmination of all that, through the *true Israelite* – Jesus himself. The God I worship is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ – God as He has been revealed to us by Jesus through his life and death and teaching and character and love.

2. Jesus says: *true worshippers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks.* Jesus is talking here about integrity. God is not concerned about us being in the right place, geographically – which building, which denomination – He’s concerned about us being in the right place spiritually.

Worshipping in truth, is not just about having a right theological understanding of God – although it does include that – but having integrity of heart. That what we say and sing with our lips is a true reflection of our hearts. That we come before God with honesty and transparency, confessing not just our sins, but our doubts, worries, fears and failures.

Listen to how Paul describes worship in this verse from Romans which we might call our key text for *Whole life worship*

Romans 12 v.1 *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship.*

2 contexts – 1. Where this comes in Paul’s letter: in the first 11 chapters Paul has described all that God has done for us in Christ. Summed up at end of ch.11 *Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!* And now at the beginning of chapter 12, Paul says **Therefore** and the rest of the letter is about how we should live in response to all the love, grace and mercy that God has shown to us.

2. Context is the way Paul’s readers were brought up to worship. Whether Jews or pagan Gentiles they would have been brought up with the idea of sacrifice. Pagans would have constantly been going to any number of local temples to sacrifice a chicken or dove or something bigger if they wanted something really important from the particular deity.

For Jews it may have been just once a year at most going to the temple in Jerusalem at a major festival or special occasion in their life, but even they would have been very aware that every day, the priests at the Jerusalem temple were making sacrifices on their behalf. For both Jew and pagan Gentile, it would have been important that the animal being sacrificed was perfect – without blemish – otherwise you might anger whichever god it was. So when Paul says *No – what you need to do brothers and sisters, is to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship.* This was quite revolutionary. I don’t know about you and I know this may be very hard for you to believe but my body is not perfect! It is not unblemished... But this is what God wants as a sacrifice – fortunately as a *living* sacrifice. Thankfully, this is not of course about us having to have our throats slit when we come to church (*not very visitor friendly!*); it’s about *the way that we live – day by day* – that is the sacrifice; living in a way that *holy and pleasing to God.* **THIS is our true and proper worship.**

In our first reading from *Colossians 3*, Paul spells out what offering our bodies as a living sacrifice day by day actually means in practice.

First of all, he talks about our relationships with one another: *clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.* ¹³ *Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.* Often it’s not easy to be patient, or humble – being willing to take a back-seat or do a menial task – or to be forbearing.

Being a living sacrifice may mean that we don’t have to slit our throats, but sometimes we have to bite our tongues. Being a bodily sacrifice is partly about putting our physical bodies on the line – doing washing up, visiting a neighbour even though dog-tired, doing shopping for an elderly friend or cooking a meal.

But being a bodily sacrifice is *also* about denying our human fleshly nature – our natural tendency towards selfishness or pride, or greed, or anger, or lust or impatience.

Paul then says that true worship will mean this way of living will affect every area of our lives and all our relationships, our marriages, our family lives, our working situations. We may not be masters and slaves, but we are bosses, managers and employees. These are our front-lines and all of them are opportunities for worshipping God by the way that we live.

Now there is a danger with all of this. The danger is that we become legalistic. A common modern sentiment is *Be the best that you can be.* In many ways that is an admirable aim, but the simple fact

is that because we are human, we will fail and even if we succeed then the danger is we become like the Pharisees – full of pride and self-righteousness – or even more likely we become hypocrites, knowing that we fail but still wanting to appear to be perfect. At that point we are no longer worshipping *in spirit and truth*.

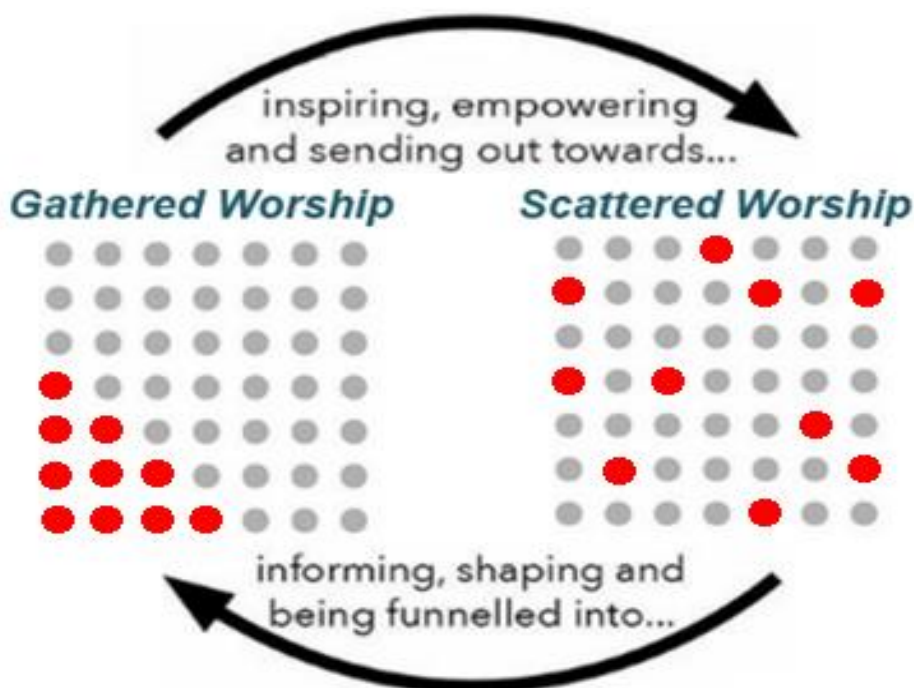
The good news is Paul tells us the secret: 15...**be thankful**.¹⁶ ... *singing to God with gratitude in your hearts*. 17*Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him*. All that we do should spring from gratitude to God Then²³ *Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters* The secret then is to be aware that whatever we do, Jesus is there right alongside us (*Alice's empty chair – I don't know if she realised but a little later she went and sat on his lap!*). So we can include him in our conversations – maybe just mentally, asking him what we should say or how we should respond maybe even out loud. *Michael Green in conversation would just spontaneously include Jesus – the conversation had seamlessly become prayer*. This awareness of Jesus alongside us and of *working for him and in his name*, will mean that we learn to see people, so see situations, to see projects and tasks through his eyes.

Yesterday we had our PCC awayday and in our opening session, we were discussing how powerful it can be when someone tells you about a problem or a loved one who is ill, to offer to pray for them. *Even if they don't believe in God*, they nearly always appreciate the kindness, and often they will end up being the first to see that the prayer has been answered and start wondering in maybe – just maybe – there is a God who cares about them.

Being aware of the presence of Jesus will also enable us in all circumstances to give thanks to the Father, to be grateful for the person we are encountering, or the task that we are called to do, or the challenge that we are called to face.

As Paul puts it in Romans 12 v.1, the way that we ensure that our daily living, is true worship, holy and pleasing to God, is if it is *Therefore* worship. In other words it is in response to all that God has done for us. Gathering together to worship is perhaps the best way to remind ourselves of how wonderful God is, how wonderful his purposes and his love and grace and mercy.

We are reminded not only through the worship songs, the readings and hopefully the sermon, but as we share together the different ways in which God has been at work during the week before in our daily lives.



This is what we mean by *whole life worship*.