

## **GRATITUDE: Giving Ourselves to God**

Romans 12:1-2

It was a letter to the inhabitants of what was then the most important and powerful city in the western world. Written today, its title might be to the Americans and sent to Washington DC, or to the Russians and sent to Moscow. To the Chinese, sent to Beijing.

But this was an ancient letter, and it was sent to Rome, and we have it in our Bibles. “To the Romans,” a 16 page letter that could be subtitled “What You Truly, Desperately Need.”

The letter’s 5 sections spell out what we all – no exceptions – desperately need. In Section One, Paul explains that

- **Section #1: No One Has It** (Romans 1-3) No one. The non-Jewish people in the world don’t have it. The Jewish people in the world don’t have it. Those who are deeply invested in sin don’t have it. Those who think they are morally better than those other, sinful, wicked people...no, not even THEY have it. No one has it.
- **Section #2: God Has Provided it** (Romans 3-5) In fact, ONLY God can provide it, and He provides it freely. No one can earn it. No one can buy it. It isn’t inherited because of lineage. It isn’t merited because of religious activity or by trying one’s best to follow all the rules. The only way anyone can get what we desperately need is when someone humbly simply believes that God will give it to him/to her...by believing.
- **Section #3: When God Provides It, It Changes Everything** (Romans 6-8).
  - It gives you **peace** with God where before you were at odds with God
  - It places you in **grace** where before you stood condemned
  - It gives you **hope** where before you really didn’t know what was ahead
  - It **reconciles** you to God rather than being an enemy of God
  - It replaces death with **life**
  - It replaces sinning with **obedience**
  - It ends obligation to the law and launches **dependence on the Spirit**

...and I’ve only scratched the surface of what Section 3 teaches.

Section 1 – No one has it

Section 2 – Only God can provide it

Section 3 – It changes everything

- **Section #4: Those Who Should have Received it, Rejected It** (Romans 9-11). They very chosen people of God, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob...who had every revelation from God pointing to it and urging them to look for it...God’s very own people rejected it.

And...

- **Section #5: Once You Have It, You need to express “Thanks!”?** (Romans 12-16)

So, what is IT? RIGHTEOUSNESS. No one on their own has it. Only God can freely give it.

When God provides it, it changes everything. **RIGHTEOUSNESS** – that standing before God that I can have because I believe that God has laid my sin on His Son, and as I believe in Him, God lays His Son's sinless **RIGHTEOUSNESS ON ME**.

Let me camp here for just a minute? I hope you've heard what I've just shared. Today, by the lavish grace of God, you can live the rest of your days on this earth, and tomorrow you can stand before God eager to enter into unimaginable eternal joy, **absolutely RIGHTEOUS**. On your own, on my own, no one here is righteous. And yet because of what Christ Jesus accomplished in his life (fulfilling the righteous requirements of the Law), in his death (satisfying the full penalty for every person's sin), and in his resurrection (conquering the power of sin and death) – you can be freely given what you cannot earn. By faith, by choosing to believe and trust in Christ, God will **GIVE** you Jesus' righteousness and change you forever.

Your Righteous Judge came out from behind the bench, sat in the electric chair, and took the penalty for you. Now He offers you His righteousness. It's yours when you believe.

So when you believe, and when God gives you His righteousness that begins to change everything, how do you say **THANKS?** I mean really.

Many years ago, a boat was wrecked in a storm on Lake Michigan, near Evanston, Illinois. Students from Northwestern University formed themselves into rescue teams. One student, a young man named Edward Spencer, saved 17 people from the compromised, sinking vessel. Later, when carried exhausted to his room, he asked, "Did I do my best? Do you think I did my best?"

Years later, R.A. Torrey (a gifted evangelist) was talking about this incident at a meeting in Los Angeles, and a man in the audience called out that Edward Spencer was actually present. Dr. Torrey invited Spencer to the platform. An old man with white hair slowly climbed the stairs as applause began to build across the auditorium. Torrey asked Spencer if anything in particular stood out in his memory. "Only this, sir," Spencer replied. "Of the 17 people I saved that morning, not one of them took the time to thank me."<sup>1</sup>

How *do* you say thanks to God? A gratitude that is adequate, a thankfulness that is fitting.

The answer is at the beginning of section 5, the very first 2 verses.

**Romans 12:1-2 (ESV)** I appeal to you therefore, brothers, in light of the mercies of God, **to present** your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

<sup>2</sup>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.

I have often found the New Living Translation helpful to further my understanding (Rom 12:1-2):

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you **to give your bodies to God** because of all He has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind He will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but **let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think**. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

Saying thanks? Paul's answer is simple and sobering

## True gratitude sells out to God

It's a personal "selling out" in two steps.

### #1 Sell-out with WORSHIP: *PRESENT MY BODY for HIS USE*

**Romans 12:1 (ESV)** I appeal to you therefore, brothers, in light of the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

"Present" means a voluntary decision that each Christian must make. "Your bodies" refers simply to YOU. The whole of who you are and what you are because of God's special creation of you. It's what Jesus said when asked about the greatest commandment. He said (Mark 12:30)

Love the Lord your God  
with all your heart,  
all your soul,  
all your mind,  
and all your strength.'

That's how Jesus put it. Paul appeals "**Present** your bodies." Make a daily, hourly, moment-by-moment **to present** your whole self.

But...Paul adds a word picture. "Present your bodies a living **sacrifice**. His phrase catapults us back into the Old Testament, when people came to church (i.e., to the tabernacle/temple) with an animal, with an *offering* in tow. There were 5 kinds of offerings prescribed by the Old Testament Law<sup>ii</sup>

1. **Burnt offering** (Lev.1,6) – **for sin committed or to express devotion to God**, animal (unblemished bull <-> dove), sacrificed and the carcass was burnt over night on the altar
2. **Grain offering** (Lev.2) - **a voluntary expression of devotion to God**, recognizing His goodness and providence, an offering from the fields of grains, something cooked, some was burnt on altar, some was consumed by the priests.
3. **Peace (*shelem*) offering** (Lev.3,7) - **Thanksgiving Offerings** (Lev 7:12), **Freewill Offerings** (7:16), and **Wave Offerings** (7:30)...both animal sacrifice and grain **to bless God and one another**, expressing by worshipping and eating together your conviction that your life and future were in God's hands. **What we will do Saturday night in our UL320 dinner**

4. **Sin offering** (Lev.4-5) – **to atone for unintentional sins, or to ritually purify oneself** in order that one could re-enter the presence of God for worship.
5. **Guilt offering** (Lev.5) - **to make reparations for one's sin against another person**. As such, this offering had a specific monetary value, and one who owed another on account of a debt due to a "sin" could repay it in silver rather than by sacrificing a ram (5:15).

Five kinds of offerings. You might be going, "Geez...you mean I just couldn't go to 9:00 AM temple, hear a few songs, listen to the rabbinic sermon, and then cut out to watch football!?" Well, you could...but not if you came to WORSHIP the God in whose hands was your very life and future.

No, you came to OFFER, you came with a SACRIFICE...something that was in your possession and now, you were deciding to put back into God's possession and control. So Paul draws from the LAWS of presenting a SACRIFICE.

*Reminds us of the story the hen and the pig who approached a church and read the sermon topic for the next week – "How can we help the poor?" Immediately, the hen said, "You know, we really should do something to help the poor. Why don't we feed the poor? Let's feed them a regular meal of bacon and eggs."*

*"Fine," replied the pig turning to the hen, "but there's one problem going with bacon and eggs. For you, **that** requires only a contribution. For me, it requires total commitment."*

True gratitude to God sells out. True gratitude worships by bringing yourself to God and truly saying, "I'm yours. Do with me what You desire...no matter what. I'm not here to make a partial contribution; there isn't a part of me that will not be totally committed to and available to You." True gratitude sells out in a life- personal presentation to God. And verse 2 explains how.

**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.

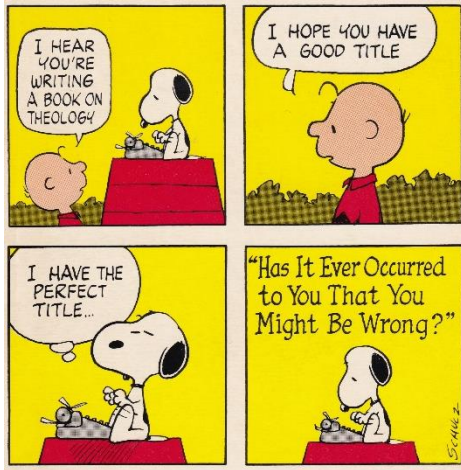
## **#2 Sell-out with CONVICTION: TRANSFORM MY THINKING for His WILL**

What does this selling out actually look like? Two basic steps that are shaped by your convictions before God. Your convictions about what it means to be a living sacrifice.

**First – A CONVICTION to SHED THE OLD MOLD** – "do not be conformed to this world"

Here's how J.B. Philips translated this verse from the original Greek:

*With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers, as an act of intelligent worship, to give him your bodies, as a living sacrifice, consecrated to him and acceptable by him. [HOW?] Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold*



In my home library sits a very important volume. It's called "And the Beagles and the Bunnies Shall Lie Down Together—The Theology in Peanuts" (Charles M. Schulz). One of my favorites...

**Has it every occurred to you** that the way you've been thinking about what's right and what's wrong, what's true and what's false, what's really important in life and what isn't important

at all...might be shot full of error? **Has It Ever Occurred to You That You Might Be Wrong?**

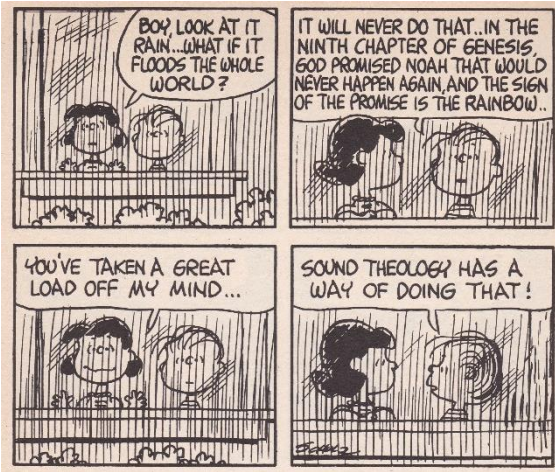
Too many Christians, I believe, place their faith in Christ – by faith they receive from God what they desperately need (RIGHTEOUSNESS!) – but then are content to think that the way they think and the way they live can stay the same. They're content to think and live the way a godless world which has not bent the knee to Jesus thinks and lives. Content to allow "the world to squeeze you into **its** mould."

- Most everyone today **gets sexual and live together** before marriage, so we are going to get sexual and mess around and live together before marriage
- That's how **committed** my friends are to **their mobile phones and social media**, that's how committed I will be to my smart phone and social media
- That's the way my dad **handled his money**, that's what my dad did for fun on the side...
- That's the way **dad treated mom...or mom treated dad...**so that's the way I'll treat my spouse
- That's the way **mom/dad used her emotional power** in the home, so that's the way I'll use my emotional power in the home
- That's the way my dad **separated out** his "business" life and dealings from his "spiritual" life and dealings, so that's the way I separate it out
- That's the way my **godless professor views the Bible**, so that's how I view the Bible
- That's the way my parents **thought dismissively about people** of other races, from other cultures, that's the way I think about other races and cultures
- That's the way...so that's the way I will think and act.

How do you say thanks? Sell-out to God? *Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould.* There is a **Second – A CONVICTION to RENEW MY THINKING**

<sup>2</sup>Do not be conformed to this world, but **be transformed** by the renewal of your mind" Again,

J.B.Phillips... "but let God re-mould your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity."



“Boy,” Lucy exclaims, “Look at it rain.... (cartoon)

“Identify and shed the old mold!” Paul cries. “Renew the way you think with the way God thinks. *Sound Theology* about every important part of your life. Soak your thinking in God’s words by God’s Spirit, His thoughts. You have a very good chance of living your life as an vivid expression of the will of God...that will bless and change everything and every

one around you.

### FINISHING UP

True gratitude – a **selling out** in worship. Presenting myself to God completely. A **selling out** with convictions. The conviction that there is pressure to be squeezed, to be conformed to a Christ-less way of thinking, and that there is a renewal of thinking that leads to a powerful Spirit-controlled, Christ honoring way of living.

Here’s the warning...let’s not settle for simply believing that gratitude toward God to be merely a lovely warm, devotional thought now and then. Not long ago, I came upon this -

**“One grateful thought.....is a ray of sunshine.  
A hundred such thoughts paint a sunrise.  
A thousand will rival the glaring sky at noonday;  
for gratitude is light against the darkness.”<sup>iii</sup>**

I thought... “That’s nice. I could hang that on my wall, and simply conclude that all God is looking for is a grateful thought per day.” But here’s the truth. True gratitude, gratitude which is true “light against the darkness” is when we present ourselves without reservation to God, and let Him and His Spirit and His word change the way we think about everything, and truly, obediently, powerfully live. True gratitude sells out.

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<sup>i</sup> Cited in Michael P. Green, ed., *1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*, 203-204.

<sup>ii</sup> Taken from <http://www.seedbed.com/5-offerings-old-testament/>

<sup>iii</sup>writes Richelle E. Goodrich, *Smile Anyway: Quotes, Verse, & Grumblings for Every Day of the Year*.