

“Thank You”
December 31, 2023
Romans 12:1-2

I. Introduction

Well, there goes another Christmas, now all that's left is the cleanup. I hope you all had a good Christmas—a good time with family and friends, eating, celebrating, and exchanging presents. Did you get any surprises? It feels good to get presents but doesn't it make you feel better to give presents—to see someone else's eyes light up when they open a present—especially one they weren't expecting. I suspect that most of us would say that as much as we like receiving, we would rather be able to give presents to others. Isn't this why we spend so much time and energy in searching for "*just the right gift?*"

What is your response when you do get a present? We may say, “Thank you” and, sometimes, give the person a hug or even a kiss. In the Carlson household, since much of our family and a lot of our friends are far away, we often call the people we get presents from—so that we can thank them in person. Also, since we are old-school, we take time to send hand-written thank you notes to anyone who gives us a present. Just like we all enjoy giving presents, we all enjoy receiving thanks from those to whom we give presents. We like to feel that our efforts and thoughts in coming up with “just the right gift” are appreciated. If someone gives you a present—especially a very nice one—don't you want to do more than just saying, “Thank You”? Don't you want to do something nice or special for them in return?

On the Sunday after Christmas—the day we celebrate God's gift to mankind, the Savior of the world, it seems appropriate to talk about God's many gifts to us and how we can say “Thank you” to Him. Today's Scripture is about saying “Thank You” to God for His gifts—not just the gift of Baby Jesus in a manger—but the gifts that come because of that Miraculous Birth and God's mercy.

As we saw last week in [John 3:16](#), it was because of God's love and mercy for the world that Jesus Christ was born in a manger so that later He could sacrifice His life so that “**whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.**” [Matthew 20:28](#) put it this way, “**Just as the Son of Man did not come to be**

served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” But God’s gifts go beyond the awesome gift of eternal life. In John 10:10, Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” or as other translations say, “more abundantly.” For that reason, Jesus said in John 14:12, “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” Turn to Ephesians 1:13-14. We need to thank God for the gift of the Holy Spirit who indwells and guides each person who has accepted God’s gift of eternal life. But it doesn’t stop there, 1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” Psalm 103:12 explains that “as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.” We need to thank God for the gift of forgiveness of sin. Other gifts from God are listed on the banners behind me—hope, peace, joy, and love. For that matter, as Christians He’s given each one of us the fruit of the Spirit. Then there’s Romans 8:35-39 which reminds us that nothing “will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” We could go on—there are so many gifts and promises from God. We need to thank God for all of His gifts.

When you made Jesus your Lord as well as your Savior; you gave Him your soul. But when Paul wrote “therefore” in today’s Scripture, he was saying that in light of all that God has given you, i.e., “in view of God’s mercy,” God deserves more.

II. In Gratitude God Deserves

A. Your body Paul began by urging, really, he gently commanded, Christians “to offer your bodies as living sacrifices.” In gratitude and in thankfulness for all His gifts, beginning with eternal life, God deserves your body. In order to accomplish God’s will on earth, Jesus Christ had to take on Himself a human body. Now each Christian needs to yield his or her body to Christ so that He might continue to do God’s work through each one of us. If God is going to build you and work through you, if you are going to experience the peace that passeth all understanding, if you are going to have an abundant life, God needs your mouth and

head and feet and eyes—He needs all of you! Turn to Romans 6:12-13. Paul then wrote how one is to offer his body to God in thanks.

1. As a living sacrifice First, “offer your bodies as a living sacrifice”—a sacrifice is an offering that is given willingly. Paul urged Christians to give themselves completely and willingly to God. In Psalm 51:17 David wrote, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” As Christians, we really have no claim on this body. Turn to 1 Cor. 6:19-20. Jesus paid the penalty for your sin, now your body really belongs to God. “Therefore, honor God with your body.”

This sacrifice is a living sacrifice. As we’ve said before, the problem with being a living sacrifice—compared to the dead sacrifices of the Old Testament—is that living sacrifices tend to crawl off the altar. Because each one of us is a living, breathing being—not a dead sacrifice—we need to continually re-gift—re-give ourselves to God. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:31, “I die every day,” i.e., he gave himself to God daily. Like Paul, we need to daily, continually give ourselves to God. When we offer God the living sacrifices of ourselves, He won’t misuse what we give Him, but He purifies it and makes it better, not only for His glory but for our present good and our eternal good. Actually, the more we give, the more we have.

2. Holy and pleasing Secondly, this sacrifice—this living sacrifice—is to be “holy and pleasing.” Holy means without blemish or defect—separated from sin. 2 Corinthians 7:1 says, “Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of a reverence for God.” And just like the Old Testament sacrifices, we are to give God our best—the first fruits. We need to give God our best in terms of talents, abilities, even our time. Bible study and prayer time shouldn’t just be when and *if* we get time but should happen when we are at our best. God deserves nothing 2nd rate—He gave His best for us; shouldn’t we do the same? These are the things that are pleasing (or as the King James Version says “acceptable”) to Him. Considering the gifts God has given us, to please Him should be our highest aim; the fact that we do please Him is our highest reward.

3. As your spiritual act of worship Third, this sacrifice “**is your spiritual act of worship.**” The word “*spiritual*” (or “*reasonable*” in the KJV) comes from the Greek word *LOGOS* from which we get the words *logic* and *logical*. In other words, Paul was saying that considering all that God has done for us, the only logical or reasonable action and, therefore, spiritual action is to give our bodies to God. When we recognize God for who He is, when we give our bodies to Him, it honors and pleases God—we are worshipping Him as we serve Him. **Turn to Hebrews 13:15-16.** As well as prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, true worship includes serving God by serving others in His name.

B. Your mind Paul went on to say that God deserves more than just your body, He also deserves your mind. It’s in the mind that you make choices--choices whether you will allow your body to wallow in sin or if you will allow your new nature to control you in holiness.

The world is constantly trying to get us to conform, to be like everyone else. It wants to control us. It tries to squeeze us or pressure us into being just like them in our attitudes and behaviors. The world tries to force each one of us to conform and adopt the world’s entertainment and music, the world’s fashions, the world’s vocabulary, the world’s attitudes, priorities, and morals—even—perhaps the word should be “*especially*”—when those things clearly do not conform to the standards of God’s Word—things like the LGBTQ agenda, abortion, fluidity of gender. **Turn to Ephesians 4:17-24.**

When Paul wrote, “**Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed,**” he was saying that rather than letting the world mold us from the outside, we are to be transformed from the inside. Paul used the Greek word *metamorfo,w* (*metamorphoo*) which is our word “*metamorphosis*.” Paul was saying that we are to undergo a metamorphosis. Just as the caterpillar gradually changes into a beautiful butterfly from the inside out—it undergoes metamorphosis, we are to be transformed from the inside out, too.

This transformation can only occur by the “*renewing of your mind.*” This change is brought about by the Holy Spirit. **2 Corinthians 3:18** says, “**And we who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are**

being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” This transformation is a continuing process—we are never going to be “done” until we get to heaven. That’s what Paul wrote to the Philippians—turn to [Philippians 3:12-14](#). This transformation will happen only if and when we allow the Holy Spirit to do His work in us.

In [Psalm 119:11](#) the psalmist wrote, “I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.” Using God’s Word, the Holy Spirit is able to renew our minds, which will then transform our whole being. Then, as [Colossians 3:2](#) says, our renewed mind will be “set on things above and not earthly things.” Just like Jesus was able to answer Satan in the Wilderness with words from God, we will be able to resist falling to temptation as we respond with God’s words.

C. Your will In thankfulness and gratitude, God deserves your body, your mind, and, finally, God deserves your will. Your mind controls your body, and your will controls your mind. No matter how hard one tries, “will power” is not enough to overcome temptation. In [Romans 7:15](#) the Apostle Paul cried, “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.” It is only when we surrender our will to God that we will have the Power—God’s power—to be victorious Christians. We need to surrender our will to God and pray as Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane in [Luke 22:42](#), “Not my will, but yours be done.”

This is the only way we can test and approve God’s will—this is the only way to know what God wants and then to be able to do it which leads to the abundant life Jesus has promised. With the Spirit’s help, we will be able to put aside our plans and, in faith, accept God’s good and pleasing plans, no matter the cost. We know that God’s plans are good and pleasing and perfect, but we need to do more than just “know it,” we must act on it and yield to Him. [James 1:22](#) says, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” God will not force us into anything, He does not dominate our wills, but allows us to choose to obey His will.

III. Conclusion

This morning as we remember Christmas and God's gifts to us, I would challenge each Christian here to do more than that. Don't just remember those gifts; daily, willingly give God your body, your mind, and your will as well as your soul to be used for His honor and His glory.

If you haven't ever accepted God's gift of eternal life, today's sermon hasn't really been for you. You have nothing to thank God for. You can choose to accept Jesus' sacrifice for your sins, and have eternal life in heaven, or you can refuse God's gift and spend eternity in hell. It was Jesus—not Pastor Steve or some theological guru—it was Jesus who said, in [John 14:6](#), "**I am the Way, the Truth, the Light, no man comes to the Father except through me.**" He is the only way you—anyone—can have eternal life.

God in His wisdom created each one of us with free will. For that reason, you have a choice whether or not to give God your body, mind, and will—but remember in [Matthew 12:30](#) Jesus said, "**He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.**" And in [Matthew 6:24](#) Jesus said, "**No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.**" So, who is your master? Who controls your body, your mind, your will? Have you given yourself to God in complete surrender? Is He truly your Lord? The answer to this question will determine your ability to enjoy God's limitless resources. When you consider what God has given you as a gift—He gave the best and all He had—shouldn't you do the same in return?

Let me close by rereading [Romans 12:1-2](#); this time I'm reading from the "*New Living Translation*": "**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.**"