

Romans 12A (2017)

- Tonight we're moving away from Paul's explanation of Israel's unique place in His plan of salvation and back into Paul's main point of teaching
 - Before we do, we still have Paul's summary at the end of Romans 11 to consider
 - This summary will serve as our transition back into his essay on righteousness
 - So let's pick up in v.28

Rom. 11:28 From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers;

Rom. 11:29 for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

Rom. 11:30 For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience,

Rom. 11:31 so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy.

Rom. 11:32 For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all.

- Paul's summary brings together everything we've learned in chapters 9-10
 - Paul says that from the standpoint or perspective of the Gospel, God made Israel His enemy for our sake
 - But Israel isn't God's enemy in all respects
 - Paul says God made them to be His enemy only in relationship to the Gospel, that is to Christ
 - Israel rejected Christ and they impeded the movement of the Gospel, and in that sense they are an enemy of the Gospel
 - But Paul goes on to say God made Israel to be this way *for our sake*, so that we might receive God's mercy for a time
 - So understanding this situation from God's perspective, we find something astounding
 - Rather than forsaking His people, God's hardening of Israel is proof that God is still very much working for their good

- It's proof that God is keeping the covenants and promises that He made with Israel
 - Paul says we can see they are still beloved for the sake of "the fathers"
 - In other words, God is still keeping every promise He gave to the patriarchs, the fathers
- And among those promises was the guarantee that God would hold Israel under judgment for their sins if they disobeyed the Law
 - For example, in the Old Covenant the Lord told Israel this:

Deut. 29:14 "Now not with you alone am I making this covenant and this oath,
Deut. 29:15 but both with those who stand here with us today in the presence of the Lord our God and with those who are not with us here today

Deut. 29:16 (for you know how we lived in the land of Egypt, and how we came through the midst of the nations through which you passed;

Deut. 29:17 moreover, you have seen their abominations and their idols of wood, stone, silver, and gold, which they had with them);

Deut. 29:18 so that there will not be among you a man or woman, or family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from the Lord our God, to go and serve the gods of those nations; that there will not be among you a root bearing poisonous fruit and wormwood.

Deut. 29:19 "It shall be when he hears the words of this curse, that he will boast, saying, 'I have peace though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart in order to destroy the watered land with the dry.'

Deut. 29:20 "The Lord shall never be willing to forgive him, but rather the anger of the Lord and His jealousy will burn against that man, and every curse which is written in this book will rest on him, and the Lord will blot out his name from under heaven.

Deut. 29:21 "Then the Lord will single him out for adversity from all the tribes of Israel, according to all the curses of the covenant which are written in this book of the law.

Deut. 29:22 "Now the generation to come, your sons who rise up after you and the foreigner who comes from a distant land, when they see the plagues of the land and the diseases with which the Lord has afflicted it, will say,

Deut. 29:23 'All its land is brimstone and salt, a burning waste, unsown and unproductive, and no grass grows in it, like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the Lord overthrew in His anger and in His wrath.'

Deut. 29:24 "All the nations will say, 'Why has the Lord done thus to this land? Why this great outburst of anger?'

Deut. 29:25 "Then men will say, 'Because they forsook the covenant of the Lord, the God of their fathers, which He made with them when He brought them out of the land of Egypt.'

Deut. 29:26 'They went and served other gods and worshiped them, gods whom they have not known and whom He had not allotted to them.

Deut. 29:27 'Therefore, the anger of the Lord burned against that land, to bring upon it every curse which is written in this book;

Deut. 29:28 and the Lord uprooted them from their land in anger and in fury and in great wrath, and cast them into another land, as it is this day.'

- Israel is currently enduring a millennial-long period of judgment, outside the mercy of God apart from a remnant
 - They endure this because God promised Israel it would happen for their disobedience to the Old Covenant
 - So incredibly, Israel's current circumstances prove God's continuing love for His people
- Paul says that from the perspective of God's choice, Israel remains beloved by God
 - For 2,000 years Israel has been under judgment
 - Yet the nation hasn't disappeared or ceased to remain a distinct people
 - And in the past century, they began to return to their land for the first time in two millennia
- This is our proof that God is still at work with them, fulfilling His promises to them, which means He still loves His people
 - And therefore we can know that He will eventually fulfill the "good" promises too
 - Just as when a parent disciplines a child properly, it's evidence of a parent's caring heart
- Nevertheless, we may suppose this is unfair or unloving
 - Perhaps we would expect the Lord to overlook Israel's rejection of Christ and forget His promises of judgment
 - But if that's what you expect, think about what you're asking
 - You're asking God to be unfaithful His promises
 - You might think you're doing Israel a favor with that petition, but in reality you're destroying your own faith

- For if God could do as you want – ignoring His promises to judge Israel and forgetting His own word to them – then what prevents God from doing the same to you?
 - If He can ignore His promise to judge Israel might He also forget His promises to give you eternal life?
 - We can't have it both ways: either God is a trustworthy God Who always keeps His promises – whether "good" and "bad"
 - Or else He is not trustworthy to keep *any* promises and we have believed in vain
- Paul emphasizes this conclusion in v.29 saying the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable
 - When God gives a gift, it cannot be refused or lost, for our possession of it didn't depend on ourselves in the first place
 - Likewise, when God places a calling on a person or group of people, that calling will never be revoked
 - Because God doesn't call in error or change His mind later
 - Paul is applying this principle to nations, but it applies equally to individuals
 - That is, our gift of eternal life is irrevocable
 - Once we have been called and justified, our standing in Christ's righteousness cannot change
 - As Jude says

Jude 24 Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy,

Jude 25 to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

- Furthermore, the calling of God on a Christian cannot be revoked
 - God calls men and women to serve Him in certain capacities and He gifts us with abilities to meet that calling
 - And these things never change, the calling is a permanent duty for life

- But regrettably, in the weakness of our flesh we may act in ways contrary to God's calling
- For example, we've all seen men or women who began in ministry only to walk away later
 - Which leaves us wondering did they reject God's calling or did He reject them?
 - Someone who walks away from God's calling is disobeying God
 - And the one who takes up a ministry without God's calling is presuming on God
 - In the case of Israel, God gifted the Jewish people with covenants and called them to be His people for eternity, and those things cannot be reversed
- Meanwhile, in v.30 Paul says God is also working His plan for Gentiles
 - We were once in Israel's place, that is outside God's mercy
 - And our collective disobedience to God became cause for God to reach out and establish a plan of redemption
 - He moved first through a single man, Abram, gifting him with a covenant by which God established the Jewish people
 - These people would be the first among all peoples to receive God's mercy in a plan of salvation
 - But when God's plan culminated in the arrival Christ, Israel was the one who acted disobediently to God
 - So then God used Israel's disobedience as just cause to begin showing mercy to the Gentiles through the same Gospel
 - And that period continues today
- But then in v.31 Paul says this course pattern has yet one more turn before we reach the finish line
 - A day is coming when the Lord will bring mercy to Israel again
 - Why? Because He owes them the same opportunity for mercy that He gave to disobedient Gentiles in times past

- Remember, Gentiles weren't seeking God when He came to us with Jesus
- We didn't deserve His mercy when He elected us to receive it
- He simply acted on His own for our sake in spite of our disobedience
- So now that Israel has become disobedient, they find themselves in the same place we Gentiles were once
 - So Paul says if God was willing to overlook our disobedience to bring us Christ in the past
 - Then in fairness He will overlook Israel's disobedience to the Gospel to bring them Christ as well
 - One day Israel will be brought to faith in Jesus too and thus will God's plan to save the nations come to its conclusion
- The central flaw - and conceit - of Replacement Theology is overlooking this final turn in God's plan of salvation
 - They acknowledge three fourths of Paul's argument
 - They acknowledge that Jews were once given mercy
 - And they agree that Gentiles were once disobedient and without God
 - And they see that God set aside Israel for their disobedience while extending mercy to Gentiles
 - But they overlook that God says He will do the same for Israel, extending mercy to them despite their disobedience
- Paul summarizes this concept powerfully in v.32
 - God has left each group, Gentiles and Jews, in their disobedience for a time
 - He shut up all, Paul says
 - We could also say God "shut out" each group for a time, leaving each group largely without mercy for a time
 - And He also extends mercy to each group for a time, thereby treating each group fairly in the end

- As we sit here today, we might see this as unfair because we are witnessing only one moment of the plan
- But by Paul's teaching, we come to appreciate that God's plan is to use one group's disobedience as just cause to go to the other group with mercy and vice versa
- When you think about what Paul is explaining, you begin to sit back in your chair in awe of the plan of God
 - And you share in Paul's exclamation at the end of the chapter

Rom. 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!

Rom. 11:34 For who has known the mind of the Lord, Or who became His counselor?

Rom. 11:35 Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again?

Rom. 11:36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

- This is the proper response to understanding the sovereignty of God and the power of God to extend His mercy to all
 - When you learned about God choosing those who will receive mercy and who will not...
 - And that God has determined to open doors or shut doors for whole groups of people over the course of history...
 - If that caused you to question God's love or even the truth of what you read in the Bible...
- Then as they say, you're doing it wrong
 - Or in this case, you're understanding it wrong
 - Because your response should be the same as Paul's response here
 - We're witnesses to the wisdom and knowledge and power of God at work to bring salvation to all people according to His will
 - And it's unfathomable
- His judgments and His mercy are unsearchable and beyond our understanding

- And if you think you know better how it should be, Paul says we are in no position to counsel God or to teach Him
- We have nothing to offer Him that He should profit from a relationship with us
- He owes us nothing for He already has all things, Paul says
- So all that God is doing in these things is for His glory, not ours
- So now we understand how Israel's rejection of Jesus and their present hardening was appointed by God
 - It was both just and purposeful on God's part
 - But it's also temporary
 - Ultimately, God plans to fulfill His promise to His people in a day to come
 - So Israel's situation does not cast doubt on our own confidence in the promises we've received from the Lord
 - Rather, God's willingness to hold His people under judgment is even greater cause for us to have confidence
 - For it tells us that God is, indeed, a promise-keeping God, even as He holds His people under judgment for a time
 - Meanwhile, we who are in Christ Jesus have no worry of such condemnation
 - Because we are not under the Law God gave Israel, so we do not share in their jeopardy
 - And what's more, anyone who has come to know Jesus as Messiah is no longer under Law
 - Therefore, the curses that Israel is experiencing now are not appointed for those in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile
 - So we can live in the light of a salvation that is without end and cannot be taken from us
 - Knowing this, how should we live?
 - That's the topic Paul will address in the last section of His letter

- Beginning now in chapter 12, we move from an explanation of how we are saved to an exhortation for how we live in light of our salvation
 - Simply put, we leave a conversation about justification (chapters 1-8)
 - And we move to a conversation about sanctification (chapters 1-15)
 - That means it's time to consult our Romans Structure chart again

Chapter 12:1-2

RIGHTEOUSNESS IN OUR PERSON

Chapter 12:3-13

RIGHTEOUSNESS WITHIN THE BODY

Chapter 12:14-21

RIGHTEOUSNESS AMONG UNBELIEVERS

Chapter 13

RIGHTEOUSNESS WITHIN SOCIETY

Chapter 14

GRACE FOR JEWISH BELIEVERS

Chapter 15:1-13

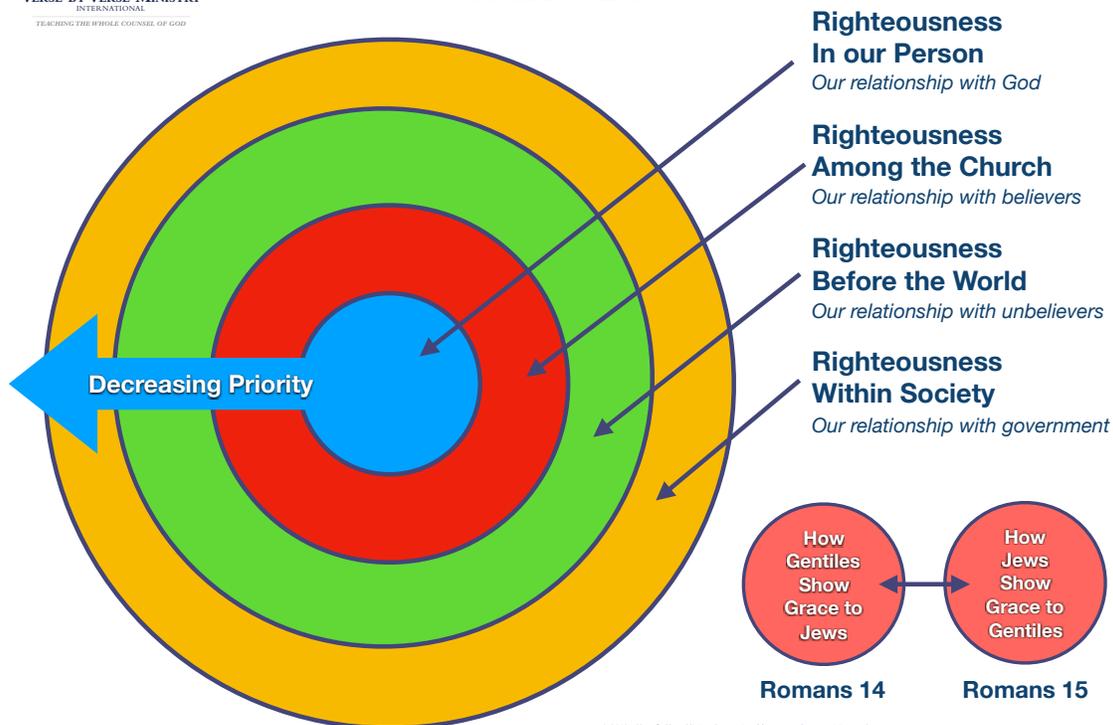
GRACE FOR GENTILE BELIEVERS

- Notice that our topic is still righteousness, but now we're talking about righteousness lived out rather than obtaining righteousness
 - Chapter 1-8 taught us we obtain righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ
 - And we can never lose that righteousness because it didn't become ours based on our actions - it came as a result of God changing our spirit
- And since we have been freed from any concerns about earning salvation, our life can be directed at serving Christ without fear or worry
 - Yet that service comes in a certain way, according to a certain priority

- And so in these chapters Paul gives us a prioritized list of the ways we should live out our righteousness in service to Christ
 - They progress from our person, to the church body, to our witness to unbelievers, to our role in society
 - And once again, at the end Paul narrows his focus on Jew vs. Gentile at the end of this section
- Before we look at the first part of this section, let's consult a new chart that will guide us through this final section



THE PRIORITY OF SANCTIFICATION ROMANS 12-15



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- Paul has organized his discussion of sanctification in a very careful manner
 - We must appreciate his structure, otherwise his instructions may appear as merely a collection of do's and don't's
 - In reality, these chapters are a prioritized system for directing our approach to serving Christ

- And his structure has the benefit of resolving conflicts that arise from competing priorities or values
- We can represent Paul's system with a bull's eye chart like the one above
 - Each ring in the chart represents a relationship in which a believer must seek for righteousness
 - The heart of the bull's eye represents righteousness in our relationship with God
 - The next ring is our righteousness among the Church, which is our relationship with believers
 - The next ring is our righteousness before the world, which is our relationship with unbelievers
 - The final ring is our righteousness within societal structures, which is our relationship with government
- The outward movement of these concentric rings sets our priority for where to work and how to resolve conflicting goals
 - The center of the bull's eye is our highest priority
 - As the rings move outward, the priority diminishes
 - For example, our relationship with God is the most important area of sanctification
 - It's a higher priority than our relationships with the church or the world
 - But as we attend to our personal holiness with God, we also become better equipped to attend to the needs of the outer rings
 - Obviously, we never "finish" working on a given ring
 - We will always battle sin in ourselves and we will always work on improving our relationships in the body of Christ, etc.
 - Nevertheless, as we gain some measure of strength in one ring, we begin to benefit from that strength as we work in other rings
 - A Christian cannot short circuit this process

- We cannot skip over an inner ring and expect to succeed in outer rings
- For example, the believer who has not made an effort to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ is not well-prepared to serve fellow believers
- Likewise, if we don't strive for holiness in our relationships within the body of Christ (where we have a safe environment to fail and learn), how will we win unbelievers?
- Finally, we work on these relationships in the power of the Spirit to convict, teach and guide us through this process
 - We can't achieve results in our own power
 - We must following the Spirit's leading, allowing Him to change our hearts over time
- When we pursue sanctification according to Paul's pattern, we gain a biblical tool for resolving conflicts in our obedience priorities
 - For example, if serving God in our personal righteousness comes into conflict with the government's demands upon us, who do we obey?
 - According to Paul's prioritized system, we must obey God over government (we'll talk more about this in chapter 13)
 - Or if our commitment to the body of Christ conflicts with our obligations to the world, we give priority to our Church relationships over the world
 - We'll look more at these examples as we go through Paul's teaching
 - But I hope you already see the value of this chart for guiding our walk with Christ
 - These chapters are much more than merely a laundry list of rights and wrongs...
 - They are the masterplan for how to live for Christ
- So let's start where Paul begins, at the center of the bull's eye: our relationship with God

Rom. 12:1 Therefore 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.

Rom. 12:2 And 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.

- This is the bull's eye of our chart, and though we have only two verses for this ring, they are the most challenging in the entire list
 - First, notice Paul's transition
 - He says therefore, as if he's moving from an earlier point
 - That earlier point is not the end of chapter 11 so much, but rather the end of chapter 8
 - As we did at the end of chapter 8, let's take a look at the end of chapter 8 and the beginning of chapter 12 fit together
 - If I put the final thought of 8 and the first thought of 12 together, they are seamless

Rom. 8:38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,

Rom. 8:39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Rom. 12:1 Therefore 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.

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- Nothing in this world or the next world can ever separate you from the love of God
- So therefore, you don't need to waste your energy on earning God's mercy...you already have it!
- So, work on these things instead
- Beginning with attending to your own personal righteousness or holiness
 - Remember, the righteousness that brings you into Heaven is not your own righteousness but Christ's righteousness obtained by faith alone
 - But that doesn't mean your personal righteousness doesn't matter

- Our personal righteousness still matters to God as a means to glorifying Him and to achieving the mission of the church
- Obviously, we cannot pursue personal holiness until we have first come to faith in Christ and received His righteousness
 - Hebrews 11 tells us that apart from faith, it's impossible to please God
 - Without the Spirit of Christ living and working in us, we have no engine to drive our spiritual change
 - And we lack a spiritual compass pointing us in the right direction
 - As I like to say, until you've walked the Romans road of chapters 1-8, you can't walk the walk of Romans 12-15
- Paul makes the same observation at the start the chapter
 - Paul urges us to take up a pursuit of personal righteousness by the mercies of God
 - The original Greek text is singular, so Paul actually wrote "by the mercy" of God
 - The mercy of God refers to God's compassion toward us in the way He saved us and gave us His Spirit
 - So Paul urges us to pursue holiness by depending on God's mercy God rather than seeking to become holy in our own power
 - Regrettably, we prefer to seek holiness without relying on the mercy of God, typically by making our own plans for how to be holy
 - Seeking personal righteousness without depending on God's mercy only arrives at self-righteousness
 - We turn a blind eye to the real sin in our lives or make excuses for the things they don't want to confront
 - While claiming victory over so-called sins that aren't the things the Spirit is asking us to address
 - Like the Christian who takes great satisfaction in never reading Harry Potter books yet carries on gossiping at every opportunity

- Unfortunately that's the only kind of "sanctification" some Christians are willing to pursue
 - It's living two different lives
 - One life is public, portraying themselves as a successful Christian, following Christ without regrets and living the dream
 - While the other life is lived in secret, filled with hypocrisy, sin, spiritual double-mindedness and the guilt that these things produce
 - But neither life is true...
 - In reality, in our secret life before God we are righteous by faith and loved unconditionally without guilt or shame
 - While in our public life, we are actually a hypocrite, in need of others' counsel, prayer, forgiveness and love
 - If you want to escape the false Christian life, seek righteousness in the right way, according to God's mercy
 - Paul gives us that way here
 - And unsurprisingly, it involves two steps that directly contradict the weaknesses of that hypocritical Christian life
- First, Paul tells us to present our sinful bodies to Christ as a living and holy sacrifice
 - Paul's drawing a comparison to the sacrificial system of the Jewish temple
 - Every morning and every night in the temple, priests would sacrifice an animal to God as directed in the law
 - Day in and day out, those sacrifices happened in the temple without fail
 - They weren't for specific sin but as an ongoing act of worship and service to God
 - The animal was killed and then its body was completely consumed by fire on the altar
 - Paul compares our service to God to that of the sacrificed animal brought before God in the temple

- Paul uses the Greek aorist tense in v.1 for the verb “present”
- The aorist tense describes an action that happen once with an effect that continues indefinitely
- So Paul’s saying that we must make a daily decision to serve God with our lives submitting ourselves to God continuing thereafter
- His verb choice reflects the struggle of sanctification
 - We know submitting to God in this way is the right thing to do
 - Yet we still struggle to do it daily and to follow through on our convictions and promises
 - Nevertheless, like those priests in the temple, we must determine every morning to honor the temple of God by making the sacrifices He requires
- Paul says our sacrifice will be with our bodies, not with an animal, and it will be by a living sacrifice, not by a death
 - God doesn’t want us repeating the animal sacrifices of the Law, for those sacrifices merely pictured greater things to come
 - The daily sacrifices pictured God’s people making a daily sacrifice by their service to God
 - So it’s our duty to practice the fulfillment of this picture, not to revisit its origins in the Law
 - So what does it look like to make a living sacrifice of our bodies to the Lord?
 - Well, in short it’s everything Paul teaches in Romans 12-15 and in the Bible over all
 - But simply put, it means placing the goal of pleasing the Lord ahead of pleasing ourselves or anyone else
 - In keeping with the meaning of the word sacrifice, it means giving up something we value because possessing it stands in the way of our personal righteousness
 - And on every day of our life, there will be some specific sacrifice the Lord will ask us to make for the sake of holiness

- Something we are holding on to – a possession, a relationship, a desire, a thought, an attitude – something that leads us away from holiness
- And each day the Lord will ask us to bring that thing before Him and burn it up on the altar of our heart
- To let it be consumed entirely, so that by its removal we may be pleasing to Him and over time become more like Him
- Now if we aren't willing to make that sacrifice today, it will still be there waiting for us tomorrow
 - So that until we make that sacrifice, our forward movement in sanctification will be impeded to an extent
 - That's why we sometimes find ourselves struggling for seasons in our walk with Christ
 - These are times when we can't seem to rise above some obstacle standing in the way of personal righteousness
 - We know what we must do but we can't bring ourselves to do it
 - And so there we stay, stuck on our path of sanctification
- During these seasons, we may still be attending church or even serving within our community
 - But these things aren't really moving us ahead because they aren't addressing the sacrifices the Lord has asked of us
 - Notice Paul says we must sacrifice what is acceptable to God
 - If God is asking to sacrifice our lust for pornography, we can't please Him by sacrificing chocolate instead
 - If God asks us to sacrifice time in Bible study, we can't substitute time spent mowing the neighbor's lawn or serving in a soup kitchen
 - If God asks us to sacrifice our pride by forgiving someone, we can't choose instead to sacrifice money by making a donation
 - We are called to present before God sacrifices that He finds acceptable
 - And we are called to do this in a living way, daily

- Paul says this is our spiritual service of worship
- And once again, he's referring back to the daily sacrifices in the temple, which were an act of worship by the priest in the temple serve
- We often talk about serving God through worship, and when we use that term we generally thinking of singing songs to God
 - That's certainly a form of worship, but Paul gives us the true form of worship
 - We worship God when we serve Him in obedience
 - By agreeing to sacrifice those unholy aspects of our life that stand between us and holiness
 - That's how we demonstrate a true heart of worship
- And it's actually the most powerful form of worship possible
 - Any heart (even an unbelieving heart) can stand up and sing a song and call it worship
 - But only a heart of faith, submitted to the will of God and seeking to please God, will be willing to make sacrifices God requires
 - So do you want to worship God? Then obey Him
 - You want to serve God? You can serve Him no better than following the Spirit's leading
- But the payoff for making these sacrifices rarely comes in the moment
 - Usually, it's a painful struggle against the flesh
 - We feel the immediate loss of what the Lord's asking us to sacrifice
 - But we don't see the fruit of our obedience for a time
 - Maybe not until we receive our reward in the Kingdom
 - Therefore, obeying the Bible's call to sacrifice will always require a measure of faith
 - We need to operate in the faith that God out of His love for us knows than we do what's best for us

- And that what He's asking us to sacrifice can't compare to what we stand to gain for obeying His call to pursue righteousness
- We must operate in faith, following the Spirit's leading, denying our flesh its desires so that we may please Christ
- When we do this, we're operating in a way that is exactly opposite of the way the world operates
 - The world says look out for #1 (i.e., yourself)
 - The world says get what pleasure you can now, because you only live once
 - The world says there is no God and there is no Hell
 - This is the way the world thinks, but even a believer can begin to think that way too, which will lead us away from serving God
- Which is why Paul says in v.2 that we must not be conformed to the world
 - The call of Romans 12:1-2 stands in opposition to the call of the world
 - And there is no way to reconcile them
 - You cannot serve two masters, as Jesus taught
 - So we are either being confirmed to the world or we are being conformed to the likeness of Christ
 - You are either moving in the direction of holiness or your are moving away from holiness
 - In other words, there is no such thing as standing still in our walk of sanctification
 - So how do we make sure we're always moving forward and not backward?
 - Paul says it requires engaging in a transformation process beginning with a renewing of your mind
 - There's the secret to successful Christian living...and it's been hiding here in the open in Romans 12
 - We transform ourselves by adopting the mind of Christ
 - Our thinking becomes more holy so that our behavior may become more righteous

- Paul's talking about spending time in the word of God and in prayer and in the counsel of godly people
 - Listening intently, considering it carefully, applying it diligently
 - It's a transformation process, one done by the Spirit of God in our hearts
 - He's the engine for that change
 - But the fuel for that engine is the word of God
- The transformation happens inside us, but it's effects are witnessed by the world
 - Paul says we seek this transformation so we may "prove" what the will of God is
 - To prove means to demonstrate truth through actions, as in to testify by our lives
 - As we transform our thinking into the Christ and our behavior follows, we testify to the will of God
 - God's will is made evident in us because our lives begin to reflect His will
 - It's like God's the director of a great theatre production, and we're the actor in our own life story
 - So God directs us to think in righteous ways, so that as we live that instruction out before the world, we show the world the director's will
 - We are showing the world what God's considers good and acceptable and perfect
 - In a word, our witness
 - It's how we make decisions, how we respond to tragedies in life, how we set priorities in our finances, how we conduct our relationships
 - It's how we raise our kids
 - It's how we treat our parents
 - It's how we love our enemies

- These decisions prove what is pleasing to God before a world blinded by the enemy
- That's the first ring in Paul's teaching on sanctification
 - It's living in a way that pleases God, pursuing personal righteousness in our relationship with God
 - While knowing we already have been credited with Christ's righteousness
 - Therefore, we work to please God for the sake of a righteous witness, not for the sake of salvation
 - The Old Testament has a simple way of describing this relationship between eternal righteousness and personal righteousness
 - In the Old Testament, a man like Noah would be declared righteous because his faith made him so in the eyes of God
 - And he was also declared blameless because he possessed personal righteousness in the eyes of men
 - Romans 12 tells us to seek to be blameless before God even as we are already righteous by faith