

OUR REASONABLE SERVICE

"I beseech you therefore, brethren by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." – Romans 12:1.

THIS exhortation of St. Paul's is based upon the preceding statements of the eleventh chapter of this same Epistle, as is shown by the connecting word therefore – because of those things recited in that chapter. The eleventh chapter tells of the mercies of God toward both Natural Israel and Spiritual Israel – not so much to the world. But the tenth chapter takes up in elaborate form the mercies of God toward all His creatures. In this Epistle the Apostle is addressing those who had been Gentiles. In view of these mercies of God (His Plan of Salvation and the call of some of the Gentiles to take the places in the Body of Christ, lost by Natural Israel) St. Paul exhorts his hearers to present their bodies living sacrifices, holy and acceptable.

The question naturally arises, Whom did the Apostle address? He evidently is using these words as an exhortation, not to the world, but to believers. The introduction to the Epistle indicates that it was written to those already consecrated. But evidently some connected with the Church at Rome had not yet made a consecration. Some who were believers, who had come to a knowledge of the Lord and had counted the cost of self-sacrifice, but who had not given themselves fully to the Lord, might yet become brethren in the Truth in the full sense. The Apostle's words would apply equally to both classes – those who had presented their bodies living sacrifices, and those contemplating doing so. It would have been fully as proper to say, Brethren, you who have already given yourselves to the Lord, I beseech you that you fulfil your Vow of Consecration; for your bodies are holy and acceptable to God.

The Heavenly Father never forces anybody; but He tells them that He is willing to accept sacrifices, and that now is the acceptable time to present them. He sets forth the fact that self-denial and sacrifice are the only terms upon which one can come into fellowship with Him. But nowhere does He urge or command any one to make a consecration. To do so would be to *change* the matter from *sacrifice* to *obligation*; and the very thought of *sacrifice* is in opposition to *requirement*.

THE TERMS OF DISCIPLESHIP

Our best example of what we should do is shown by our Lord and the Apostles, the chief members of God's royal family. Our Lord did not seek to entrap any into His service – as we see done today. On the contrary, He proceeded along high and noble lines. He said, "Come unto Me, all ye that are oppressed and heavy-laden." This is an appeal to reason. If you have found that you are sin-sick, come unto Me – I have the will and the way to help you to come to the Father.

When talking to the young ruler of the synagogue, our Lord set forth the terms of discipleship. He did not say, Never mind; do not make it too serious a matter. On the contrary, He stated just what are the terms of consecration. No man *could* be His disciple unless he would surrender *all*. To this rich young man our Lord showed that with all his morality there was inconsistency. He possessed wealth, and should use that wealth to the glory of the Lord. He must not be selfish, or he could not be Christ's disciple.

The young man might have said, I have some children for whom I must make provision. But the Lord said, Give all that you have to God. A parent can consecrate his children, so far as he is concerned. The Lord would not ask any one to do that which he was unable to do. But he said, "Take up *your* cross and follow Me," if you would be My disciple. – Mark 10:21.

Again our Lord said, "He that putteth his hand to the plow, and looketh back, is not fit for the Kingdom." (Luke 9:62.) We should make up our mind to use all of our powers, or else stand aside. The Lord's method should be our guide. We should not try to entrap any one or resort to hocus-pocus to convince any one. We should not plead what there is to be gained in a material way by becoming a Christian. We should tell people that there is no other way to come into Christ but by the way of the cross. We cannot reach Him in any other way. It is the *Lord's* way or *no* way. We must [R5422 : page 87] bear the cross, as He bore it. We believe that we do the people more good by setting forth the Message with no uncertain sound than trying to entrap them. Nevertheless, in putting before them the trials and cross, we should also put before them the glory to follow.

TEXT APPLIED TO THE CONSECRATED

To those who have already made a consecration the thought would be, You have entered into a Covenant with God to follow Jesus. You have given up your own human will. Remember that this includes your mortal body. Continue the work of presenting your body – of dying daily. Keep before your mind this Covenant of Sacrifice; for it is not yet fulfilled. The mere *promise* to fulfil a covenant is not *fulfilling* it.

The Father begets us of the Holy Spirit, and gives us the great privileges that belong to those who have become New Creatures in Christ. Then it is for us to go forward, and day by day lay down our lives in His service. It would be appropriate, therefore, for the Apostle to say to such, Lay down your lives daily. Remember that it is your mortal bodies which you are to sacrifice in the Lord's service. It is yourselves as old creatures, human beings, and not as New Creatures, that are being sacrificed. Yours is a living sacrifice in the sense that this body, reckonedly passed out of sin, is being continually sacrificed. It is not given to *preserve*, or to be your everlasting possession; but it is your covenant and privilege to

accomplish the sacrifice of your flesh. Therefore I beseech you to do this.

TEXT APPLIED TO THE TENTATIVELY JUSTIFIED

To those whose justification has not been vitalized, the text might mean, You are desirous of serving God. This is indicated in your attending the meetings of the Church. The fact that you assemble with the saints of this congregation signifies that you love holy things – that you desire to know the will of God. Now then, **[R5423 : page 87]** brethren, I beseech you to make a full consecration of yourselves to God. Consider your body as a living sacrifice – not that you are to commit suicide and destroy your body, but that you are to esteem your body a living sacrifice, day by day using your strength and your life in the Lord's service.

The exhortation, "Present your bodies," then, would seem to be applicable both to the consecrated and to those who are following on to know the Lord. The next statement should be understood to be in harmony – "holy and acceptable to God." If this statement be taken in relation to those who are already consecrated, then the Apostle is saying, This vitalization of your justification which the Lord has granted you has constituted you holy. And because the Lord counts you holy, and yourselves wholly acceptable to Him, you should continue to do good works – complete the good work which you have begun. The sacrifice being esteemed of God holy and acceptable, the results will be grand and glorious.

This exhortation, viewed from the standpoint of one who has not completed his consecration, might be understood to mean, if you take this step of consecration, remember that then the merit of Christ will be imputed to you, and that through the arrangement which He has made in Christ God is willing to accept you.

CONSECRATION TO DEATH MOST REASONABLE

Every one who recognizes God's mercies and blessings finds it a "reasonable service" to sacrifice the earthly things for the precious privilege of serving Him. If it was a reasonable service for Jesus to leave the Heavenly glory, to become a man, and to sacrifice Himself unto death, then surely ours is most reasonable. We, being imperfect, have very little to give; and when there is an opportunity for showing our appreciation of the Heavenly Father, then we should make haste to use it.

The Father made a proposition to the Lord Jesus, and it is not to be supposed that He would suggest anything but a reasonable service. To have asked Jesus to sacrifice His life for humanity without any reward of a future life would have been a most unreasonable thing. The Father set before the Redeemer a great joy, to be the recompense of His obedience. And so with us. The Lord does not invite us to sacrifice ourselves at the present time without any reward from Him. He tells us that if we do this He will make us joint-heirs with His Son, participators with Him in all the joys of the Kingdom.

CONSECRATION NOT THE END OF OUR WORK

The term *Brethren* may be viewed from two different standpoints. On the one hand, we may apply it to those who are in the state of prospective justification, in a justified attitude of mind, and whose justification is growing by every step they take toward God. On the other hand, it would refer to those who have become brethren in the fullest sense – who have taken the step of consecration, and whose consecration has been accepted by the Father through the Lord Jesus. With these there is a continual, a daily presentation. This morning we presented ourselves before the Lord and asked His blessing on the day. It is a presentation day by day and hour by hour. It is a constant surrender of self-will, in this way and in that way – a daily waving of our offering before the Lord.

So it was with our Lord Jesus. He not only made the full consecration at the beginning, but day by day He laid down His life, until the sacrifice was completed on Calvary.

For one to make a consecration of his time and his talents, and then to withhold his offering, would insure his not gaining the great prize for which the Father invited him to run. The Great Company will be made up of those who have presented their bodies, but who neglected their opportunities for laying down their lives – their time, influence, money, all – in the Lord's service. This neglect will lose them their place in the Throne, their privilege of being a part of the Bride class. The Bride will be made up of those who not only have presented their bodies in the beginning, but have faithfully continued that presentation unto death.

CONSTRAINED BY GOD'S MERCIES

The Apostle states the reason why we should make this presentation of ourselves as being the "mercies of God" – "I beseech you by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies." God's mercies are to a certain extent over all. He sends His sunshine and His rain upon the evil as well as upon the good. For many centuries God's special mercies were granted only to the Jews. But the arrangement of God's Plan is such that Gentiles, as well as Jews, may now come into God's favor. God broke down the middle wall of partition through Christ, and thus gave all people an opportunity to come back into harmony with Him and to have Him as their Father, their Life-Giver, and through Christ to share His blessings.

As many as see and hear and have the eyes of their understanding opened, should consider this a reason for a full consecration, a full surrender, to the Lord. It is truly a most reasonable service, as the Apostle points out; and the prize which He attaches to the matter makes it unspeakably desirable and precious. It would be very *un*reasonable to accept God's marvelous favors and then neglect to live up to the conditions attached to them.

If [R5423 : page 88] we really *believe* God, if we have a proper faith in His exceeding great and precious promises, we will joyfully and faithfully meet the requirements.

A lady said to us recently: You put more stress on godly living than we in our Church have done. You say, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." You put a special stress on *believing*. Yes, we replied, this word *believe* has a most important bearing on the entire matter. If we should say to you that if on your way home today you would stop at a certain house, of a certain number, you would find, in a particular corner under the steps, a little bag, and that it contained valuable treasure which should be yours – if you believed our words you would go and get that bag. If you said that you believed us, and then went another way altogether, we would be sure that you had not believed us. Your course would prove it.

Now the Lord has offered us the opportunity of being joint-heirs with Jesus Christ our Lord in "an inheritance incorruptible and individual and that fadeth not away." If we *believe* this fact, we will seek to know just what the conditions are. Whoever *really believes* will find that the conditions are very easy in comparison with the great reward. But if he fails to put forth his greatest effort to win this great prize, he will show that he has not *believed* the Message; for if he recognizes the offer and *believes* it, he will surely be eager to lay aside every weight and encumbrance and run patiently to the end to obtain the crown. – Hebrews 12:1,2.

THE COMPLETENESS OF OUR OFFERING

It is, therefore, a reasonable service. The Apostle tells us the conditions. All who would have this great blessing must offer themselves living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God. It is ours to present our bodies. It is not the New Creature who does the presenting; there is no New Creature at the time the body is presented. Our natural mind discerned from the Message of the Lord

that there is a more excellent way – of harmony with the Lord – and we desired to come thus into harmony with Him. And that new, or changed, will presents our earthly interests and *all that we have* in sacrifice. We are altogether *human* when we offer ourselves to the Lord. We are then begotten to a new mind, a new hope, and thus are New Creatures.

While we present ourselves to God, we do not come to Him directly with our presentation. We come through the great High Priest – as in the type, the offering of the Lord's goat was presented by the high priest. We come to the Father through the Redeemer. We do not offer a justified sacrifice, but come with all our sins, for cleansing in that fountain opened for us. The sentiment of our hearts is:

"Just as I am without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee –
O Lamb of God, I come!"

But God could not accept a sacrifice in that imperfect condition; it is only as we come through the Priest that He recognizes us. If we were *perfect*, we might come in our own name; but *we are not* perfect, and so we come only through this High Priest, Jesus. The great High Priest then imputes His merit, and includes our sacrifice as a part of His own. The Divine blessing then comes upon us – we are begotten of the Holy Spirit. Thenceforth we are New Creatures in Christ. We have been presented in God's way and have been accepted.

REFUSAL TO ACCEPT SHOWS LACK OF APPRECIATION

Now we are dead; and our life is hid with Christ in God. We presented our bodies, and they were made *living* sacrifices: they were then received by God and were slain with Christ and we arose

to walk in newness of life. By the *body* is meant also all the earthly interests, both present, past and future – every interest that we ever had or might ever have. Such a one gives up all the hope or right he might otherwise have had in a future Restitution. The covenant is a complete one. The sacrifice of such became holy and acceptable to God as soon as the merit of Jesus was imputed; and our offering continues to be acceptable to the end. And as day by day we lay down our lives in the Lord's service, it brings us more and more of the Lord's blessings, and we are more and more filled with His Spirit. [R5424 : page 88]

To render all that we have in the service of the Lord is not only a most reasonable thing, but an offering far too small. It is far less than we would gladly render to Him who has manifested toward us such wondrous compassion and grace. When God has offered us so great a reward and blessing in return for our poor lives, we should feel that a refusal to accept this offer would be an indication not only of a pitiful lack of appreciation of Infinite Goodness, but also a weakness of mind. It would show a puerility of judgment which is unable to weigh and compare the trifling and transitory pleasures of self-will for this brief life with an eternity of joy and blessing and glory on the Divine plane, far above angels and principalities and powers and every name that is named, next to our glorious Lord and Head – a station so glorious, so exalted, that no human mind can grasp its infinitude. Let us be faithful – even unto death!

