

A Reasonable Service

by J. Wilbur Chapman

The sermon emphasizes the importance of presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice to God, which is a reasonable service in light of the mercies of God and the sacrifice of Christ.

Scripture: Romans 5:1-6, Galatians 1:11

Topics: "Consecration To God", "Christian Living"

Description

J. Wilbur Chapman preaches on the importance of presenting our bodies as living sacrifices to God, emphasizing the deep significance of this act of consecration. He highlights Paul's intense care and love for his people, urging believers to yield themselves to Christ in a manner that is both inspiring and convicting. Chapman underscores the mercies of God outlined by Paul in Romans, pointing to justification, safety, deliverance, and the assurance of no condemnation or separation for those in Christ. He challenges listeners to consider the reasonableness of this call to consecration in light of God's immense love and the work He has done for each individual.

Transcript

TEXT: "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.

There is perhaps no chapter in the New Testament, certainly none in this epistle, with which we are more familiar than this one which is introduced by the text; and yet, however familiar we may be with the statements, if we read them carefully and study them honestly they must always come to us not only in the nature of an inspiration but also with rebuke, especially to those of us who preach.

Paul's intellectual ability has never been questioned. Yet, giant though he was in this respect, he was not ashamed to be pathetic when he likens his care for his people to the care of a nurse for her children. He is not ashamed to be extravagant when he likens his sorrow and pain at their backsliding to the travail of a woman for her child. He is not ashamed to be intense when in the ninth chapter and the first, second and third verses he says, "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh."

We must also be impressed with the fact that he was not at all afraid of public criticism. He not only sat at Gamaliel's feet but the great lawmaker might well have taken his place at his feet, and yet he says, "I am

willing to be counted a fool if only I may win men to Christ." He is not bound by custom. He not only preaches in the synagogue and in the places set apart for the churches of the early days, but he goes about from house to house entreating people to come to Christ. He is not ashamed to weep, for he sends his messages to the people and exclaims, "I tell you these things weeping"; and here in this text he is strikingly unusual, for he is not a preacher speaking with dignity, nor an Apostle commending obedience, but a loving friend beseeching in the most pathetic way the yielding of themselves to Christ.

There are two things to remember about Paul in the study of such a subject.

First: He was a Jew and he knew all about offerings. Sacrifices were not forms to him and a living sacrifice was not a meaningless expression. He had been present on the great day of Atonement when the scapegoat bore away the sins of the people. He had heard the chimes of the bells on the high priest's robe as he moved to and fro before the entrance to the holy of holies, and he had waited with breathless silence for him to come forth giving evidence in his coming of the fact that Israel could once more approach Jehovah. The text to him was throbbing with holy memories and was full of significance.

Second: He received his instructions concerning these things of God, not from men, for when he writes to the Galatians he says: "But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man, for I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:11-12). And so, since he is a heaven-taught man, we must listen while he speaks and give heed to his entreaties.

I

The context. We shall not appreciate this striking text unless we take into account its setting.

The first chapters of Romans present to us a black cloud indeed, for when the first sentences are spoken we shudder because of their intensity. We read in the twenty-fourth verse that God gave the people up to uncleanness; in the twenty-sixth verse that he gave them up to vile affections, but in the twenty-eighth verse that he gave them over to a reprobate mind. With this awful condition of affairs we start; and yet for fear that the man who counts himself a moralist might read these verses and feel that they did not apply to him, Paul writes in the third chapter and the twenty-second verse these words, "Even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference." But when the cloud is the blackest the rays of light begin to appear, and they are rays of light from heaven; looking on the one side at mystery and catching a vision on the other side of grace, Paul exclaims, "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).

The word mercy is of frequent occurrence in the Bible. "From everlasting to everlasting is God's mercy," we read. This gives us some idea of duration. "New every morning and fresh every evening are his mercies." This reveals to us the fact that they are unchanging. "He is a God of mercy." This is his character. "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts and let him return unto the Lord and he will have mercy upon him." This is the invitation of God given to all the world! But Paul is not speaking of mercy in general; he goes on in his masterful argument outlining the doctrines of grace and on the strength of that he uses the text.

First: We are justified. The fifth chapter and the first verse, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." In justification our sins are pardoned and we are accepted

as righteous because of the righteousness of Christ, which is imputed unto us and received by faith alone. And yet to him this definition in every day language means that, being justified, we stand before God as if we never had sinned. No wonder that in the light of such a doctrine Paul could say, "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).

Second: We are kept safe. Romans 5:10, "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." Literally the closing part of this verse is, "We are kept safe in his life." A child in its mother's arms could not be so secure as we in his life. Underneath us are the everlasting arms and around about us the sure mercies of God.

Third: We are baptized into his death. "Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" (Romans 6:3). "The wages of sin is death." This is God's irrevocable statement, but Christ died for our sins and Paul's argument here is that we died with him, so the demands of the law have been met and we are to go free. No wonder Paul could say, "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."

Fourth: We are alive unto God. Romans 6:11, "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Not only are we justified and kept safe and crucified with him and buried with him but in the plan of God we are risen with him. What a wonderful mercy this is!

Fifth: We have deliverance from the self life. The seventh chapter of Romans is just the cry of a breaking heart and reaches its climax in the twenty-fourth verse, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" But the deliverance is in the eighth chapter, especially in the second verse, "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." What a mercy this is!

Sixth: For those of us who believe there is no condemnation. Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Judgment is past because he has been judged. We have nothing to do with the great white throne; Christ as our substitute has met sin's penalty and paid our debts. What a mercy this is! No wonder Paul is thrilled with the thought of it.

Seventh: No separation. Romans 8:38-39, "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." So that for time we are safe and our eternity is sure. Was there ever such a catalogue of mercies? In the light of all this the Apostle exclaims, "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).

It is a good thing to study Paul's "therefores." He is a logician of the highest type.

In Romans 5:1, there is the "therefore of justification."

In Romans the eighth chapter and the first verse there is the "therefore of no condemnation."

In Romans the twelfth chapter and the first verse there is the "therefore of consecration," and this as a matter of fact is the outline of the Epistle.

II

Present your bodies. This means the entire yielding of one's self to Christ. It corresponds to the Old Testament presentation of the burnt offering all of which was consumed. Back in the Old Testament times for fourteen years there had been no song in the temple, for it was filled with rubbish and uncleanness, but the rubbish was put away and the uncleanness vanished, the burnt offering was presented and the song of the Lord began again. If you have lost your song and have been deprived of the harmony of heaven then present your bodies a living sacrifice.

There is a threefold division in man's nature.

The Spirit, where God abides if we are his children. This is like the holy of holies.

The Soul, which is the abode of the man himself.

The Body, which is the outer court.

When Christ was crucified the veil of the temple was rent in twain and the whole was like one great compartment. I cannot but think that if we should come to the place of complete consecration, the acceptance in our lives of what was purchased for us when he was crucified, for us the veil of the temple would be rent in twain and not only would God abide in our spirits but he would suffuse our whole nature, look with our eyes, and speak with our lips. This must have been what Paul meant when he said, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

III

A living sacrifice. That is in contrast with the dead offering of the Old Testament sacrifice. Suppose for a moment that it would have been possible for an offering to have been presented in the Old Testament times and then after that for it to have lived again; it is inconceivable that this offering would have been put to any unholy use. I have many times tried to imagine the surprise of the son of the widow of Nain and the daughter of Jairus after their being raised from the dead. They certainly could not have lived selfish, sinful lives again, and I am sure that Lazarus when once he had been in the grave and was raised at the voice of the Master could never again have been worldly and unclean. But let it not be forgotten that we are a risen people; we were crucified with Christ, we died with Christ, we were buried with Christ, we have risen with Christ! How then ought we to live?

In one of our western cities a minister told me recently of a young man who had graduated at a school for stammerers and came to see him one day. Keeping time with his fingers in the use of his words he said slowly:

"I--want--to--speak--to--you." Without following his method of speech through I will quote what he said: "I have for a long time wanted to be a Christian and was ashamed to attempt to speak when it was so imperfectly done, but now I have graduated and I have the control in part at least of my speech, and I have come to you to-day to make my confession, for the first use I make of my voice must be the confession of him who loved me and gave himself for me."

IV

Your reasonable service. It is a reasonable service,

First: Because God uses human instrumentality and he needs you, and it is therefore a reasonable demand to make, for we should place ourselves absolutely at his disposal.

In the guest book of a friend I saw recently a few lines written by Dr. John Willis Baer in which he said, quoting from another:

"God gave himself for us.

"God gave himself to us.

"God wants to give himself through us."

But if our lives are inconsistent and our hearts are unclean he cannot do it. If we have not yielded ourselves altogether God himself is limited.

Second: It is a reasonable request to make because of what God has done for us.

One of the distinguished ministers of the Presbyterian Church told us the other day in a conference in a western city that a little boy who had been operated upon by Dr. Lorenz said as soon as he came out from under the anesthetic, "It will be a long time before my mother hears the last of this doctor"; and then, said my friend, "I thought of an incident in my own life of a poor German boy whose feet were twisted out of shape, whose mother was poor and could not have him operated upon, and I determined to bring him to a great doctor and ask him to take him in charge. The operation was over and was a great success. When the plaster cast had been taken off from his feet my friend said he went to take him home. He called his attention to the hospital and the boy admired it, but he said, 'I like the doctor best.' He spoke of the nurses and the boy was slightly interested, but said, 'They are nothing compared to the doctor.' He called his attention to the perfect equipment of the hospital and he was unmoved except as again and again he referred to the doctor. They reached the Missouri town and stepped out of the station together, and the old German mother was waiting to receive him. She did not look at her boy's face nor at his hands but she fell on her knees and looked at his feet and then said sobbing, 'It is just like any other boy's foot.' Taken into her arms, the minister said all the boy kept saying to her over and over was, 'Mother, you ought to know the doctor that made me walk.'"

Then my friend said, "There is not one of us for whom Jesus Christ has not done ten thousand times more for us than the doctor did for this boy, and we have never spoken for him, we have not yielded ourselves to him." It must have been with some such spirit as this that the Apostle said, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1).

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