

THE DEDICATED LIFE

"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.

In presenting Christ to men, Paul delighted to play on the gentler notes. His preaching was predominantly persuasive. There were at least two important matters about which he expressed this attitude of entreaty, namely, our salvation, or our reception of Christ, and our surrender, or Christ's reception of us. In our text he was writing on the latter, and he did so in the most tender and winsome language: "I beseech you, brethren." To "beseech" means to entreat, to implore, to beg, or to ask with great urgency. To his brethren in Christ Paul expressed the intensity of his plea and the urgency of his request, recognizing the fact that they were free to act as they pleased.

In the light of the urgent appeal for the dedicated life, there are some things about it to which I desire to direct your prayerful attention and consideration:

I. The Meaning of the Dedicated Life.

As soon as Christ had saved him, Paul instantaneously lifted self out of the seat of authority in his life, and enthroned Christ therein. Thereafter, God's will for his life was the matter of chief concern to Paul. To him life was no longer a question of being or of having this or that; it was simply a question of the will of God -- discovering it and doing it, regardless of everything else. Ready to go anywhere God wanted him to go, and anxious to do anything that He wanted him to do, Paul gratefully and cheerfully laid himself upon the altar for Christ, and this dedicatory act was a source of great and joyous satisfaction to him ever after. Later, through the words of our text, Paul very earnestly and affectionately entreated all believers in Christ to yield and dedicate themselves without reservation to the doing of God's will. May the Holy Spirit carry home to our hearts this earnest plea for a full surrender or yielding of ourselves to God to be used in His service in compliance with His perfect will! To achieve His will is the greatest possibility in our lives.

"In full and glad surrender
I give myself to Thee,
Thine utterly and only,
And evermore to be."

II. The Motivation for the Dedicated Life.

It is never easy for one to shift the control of his life to another. For a Christian to accomplish this, he must have a strong motive and a powerful purpose. An adequate motive for the eagerly dedicated life is to be found in "the mercies of God." His mercies have been, and are, so numerous, varied, and unailing that we cannot meditate upon them without acknowledging their claim upon us. These mercies are not merely general, but they are specific. They have been revealed in Christ, and are perpetually operative through Him.

Among the mercies of God are the following: creation, preservation, redemption, forgiveness, liberation, justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification. We are Christ's by creation, He made us; we are His by redemption, He died for us; and we

are His by preservation, He sustains and protects us. His mercies may well excite gratitude in us, because they are undeserved, sovereign, and free. A yielded or dedicated life is the only reasonable and worthy response that the children of God can make to express their love for and gratitude to Him Who gave His all to redeem them from their sins. As we reflect upon all that God has done for us through Christ, we are reminded anew that we owe Him a tremendous debt of love and gratitude. In the light of what God has done for us in and through Christ, the Holy Spirit, through Paul, urges us to present ourselves unto Him. The love of Christ for us constrains us to yield ourselves unreservedly unto Him. He gave His all for us, and we have forgiveness, deliverance, and victory through Him. In response to His amazing love for us, we should cheerfully and wholeheartedly present ourselves to Him. Unquestionably Christ merits our recognition of His lordship in all the realms of our lives, and it is, therefore, to our infinite advantage to give Him the place to which He is justly entitled.

"We give Thee but Thine own
Whate'er the gift may be;
All that we have is Thine alone,
A trust, O Lord, from Thee."

Among the numerous and invaluable mercies of God, of which we are the fortunate beneficiaries, even though we do not deserve them, are the following:

1. Pardon for the Past.

"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile" (Psalm 32:1-2). These three words -- transgression, sin, and iniquity -- reveal the need of forgiveness. It is well to note that forgiveness is described here in three ways: as the removal of a burden, as the covering of sin, and as the cancelling of a debt. "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered" (Romans 4:7). Oh, the joy of experiencing God's wonderful forgiveness! There is no other joy like it. It is truly wonderful to have your sins forgiven, and cleansed by the precious blood of Christ.

2. Peace in the Present.

Peace with God is the result of pardon for the past. God's Word says, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). No other blessing is comparable to peace with God, which is the inevitable result of the forgiveness of sin.

3. Power for the Future.

The Bible says, "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace: (Romans 6:13-14). From the depths of our hearts we should praise the Lord for the wonderful victories which He has given us, and for those which He has promised to bestow upon us in the future.

In view of these remarkable mercies, what can we do except present ourselves unto the Lord?

"But drops of grief can ne'er repay
The debt of love I owe;
Here, Lord, I give myself away,
'Tis all that I can do."

III. The Method.

Christ set a perfect example for all of His followers who have a desire to live a yielded life. He came to the earth for the express purpose of doing His Father's will, regardless of what might be involved therein, or of where it might lead Him. While He was here, Christ never uttered a word of complaint about the Father's will, implying that it was irksome or difficult, but rather He delighted to comply with it to the fullest extent.

To all who are the children of God the text voices the earnest entreaty "that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice." Such a presentation of the body is a personal, voluntary, and loving transaction. The very fact that the verb, "present," is in the aorist tense denotes that it is an instantaneous act, which is done now, once and for all, and never to be repeated. God wants you to bring your body to Him, of your own free will, place it at His disposal, and say, "Take it God; it belongs to Thee by right of creation, preservation, and redemption; so, I here and now commit it to Thee for use in Thy service." Nobody, except yourself, can present your body to the Lord, just as no one else can get married for you. Most people are ruled largely by their bodies. They spend much of their time in thinking about what they will put into, on, or over them. They also spend considerable time and money in providing for their bodies new and pleasurable sensations. It would be so much better if all professing Christians would withdraw their bodies from the service of Satan, and offer them in glad and full surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ. Through their bodies, which at intervals they misuse and abuse, they can render an acceptable service and bear an effective witness for Christ. As they place themselves at the disposal of the Lord, their bodies become instruments of real righteousness. In fact, it is only through the body that any Christian can serve his generation in compliance with the will of God. Our Lord would have us to present our bodies to Him here and now, not as a means of propitiation, but as an offering of gratitude and love. Regard your body as an instrument for the indwelling Spirit of God to use as He desires, and then dedicate it to God for Him to use in the strengthening of the saved and in the evangelization of the unsaved. Have you made this presentation of your body to Him? If not, do so now and thereby prove your love for Him.

"To Him I owe my life and breath,
And all the joys I have;
He makes me triumph over death,
And saves me from the grave."

When you definitely present yourself to the Lord to be His entirely and forever, the Holy Spirit will enrich and empower you far beyond your fondest expectation. Your very best interests are involved in your compliance with God's blessed will as expressed in our text. What a pity that so many professing Christians seem to think that God is going to deprive them of some choice blessings if they present their bodies and

yield their lives to Him! As a matter of fact, the dedicated life is the only one that is really pleasing to God or truly satisfying to us. Voluntarily and unreservedly present yourself to the Lord and let Him take complete possession of you, and control all that you are and all that you have, and you will enjoy a richer and fuller life than you have ever known.

Why should we present our bodies to the Lord?

1. Because of what Christ has done for us.

Christ gave everything that He possessed for us. He gave His back to be scourged, His head to be crowned with thorns, His hands and feet to be nailed to the cross, and His side to be pierced with a spear. He gave His life for you.

2. Because of what Christ desires to do in us.

In salvation Christ gives and you receive. In dedication you give and He receives. Dedication is a personal thing, a transaction between you and Christ. When you yield your life to Christ, the Holy Spirit will begin a great work in you. The work of Christ for you is followed by the work of the Holy Spirit in and through you.

3. Because of what Christ wants to do through us.

Christ wants to do a great work through every individual who is surrendered to His will. There is no limit to what He is able to do through any person who is thoroughly dedicated to Christ.

The yielded life recognizes that it is God's prerogative to choose our place of service, be it humble or obscure; and to select our task, be it outstanding or insignificant. God is looking for instruments which He can use.

When Isaiah heard the Lord say, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?", it dawned on him that the Lord was looking, waiting and calling for a human instrument through whom He might accomplish His purpose. Specifically He was looking for a messenger to His people. God is still looking for volunteers from among those whom He has saved to carry His gospel to the unsaved. Without consulting anyone, Isaiah committed himself into the hands of the Lord saying, "Here am I; send me." It is noteworthy that Isaiah did not say, "Send somebody else," but he said, "Send me." Instead of trying to shirk his responsibility, as so many professing Christians do, Isaiah willingly and cheerfully accepted it. He offered himself to the Lord just as he was and with what he had — his personality, his possessions, and his plans. When Isaiah yielded himself to God, saying, "Here am I; send me," the messenger had arrived, the message had someone to communicate it, and the energies of God were set to work. It is the human surrender to God that releases the divine power.

IV. The Measure.

"Present your bodies a living sacrifice." A sacrifice is the voluntary offering to another of something that is very precious to the possessor, and that is exactly what the Lord asks us to do. Christ asks us to hand over to Him all that we are and have. He wants entire and permanent control of it.

If the Christian is to yield his life to Christ, then self must be dethroned and the Lord must be enthroned. The deepest purposes of the heart from now on must be entirely His. One must say in substance, "Lord Jesus, from now on, I want every thing in my life to come within Thy will. I do not want anything in my life to be outside of Thy will or against it."

As to the measure of the yielded life David Livingstone said, "I give Him everything, but what a pity that I have so little to give." But, no gift which the Lord receives and uses is ever small. A lad had five barley loaves and two small fishes, and he readily gave them to the Lord in order that He might use them in feeding the multitude. This lad reached out from himself to others through Christ. He reached out beyond the day in which he lived to our day in influence for the Lord. The Lord's use of little things brings honor and glory to himself, to Whom all praise belongs. Felix of Nola went into a cave and prayed for safety. God sent a spider to build a web over the entrance to the cave. About ten minutes later enemies of Nola came along. They were about to enter the cave to look for their man when they discovered the spider web across the mouth of it. Thinking the web should have been broken if Felix had entered, they hastened on in search of him. Rejoicing in the deliverance of God, Felix wrote these words: "With God on our side a spider's web is like a wall of adamant, but with God against us, a wall of adamant is no better than a spider's web." You hold something which the Lord can use, but He cannot use you or it unless you surrender yourself and what you have to Him.

Dr. J. Wilbur Chapman once said to General William Booth, "Tell me what has been the secret of your great success?" He answered, "God has had all there was of me. There have been men with greater brains, greater opportunities than I, but from the day I had a vision of what God could do with poor old London, I made up my mind that God would have all there was of William Booth." From this statement we learn an important truth, namely, the greatness of a man's power is the measure of his surrender.

Lovely Florence Nightingale was asked the secret of her power. She thought a moment and then replied, "The secret is I work very hard, and I never have refused Christ anything." That kind of dedication will win anywhere in the world. Such dedicated lives are needed tremendously in these days. Our Lord wants you to place yourself entirely at His disposal.

"All for Jesus! all for Jesus!
All my being's ransomed powers;
All my thoughts and words and doings,
All my days and all my hours.

Let my hands perform His bidding;
Let my feet run in His ways;
Let mine eyes see Jesus only;
Let my lips speak forth His praise."

Present your body to the Lord. It belongs to Him and not to you. He made it and loaned it to you for your lifetime, but it is His. He gives you every beat of your heart and every breath of your lungs. If Christ is to control the actions of your body, then you must seat Him on the throne. In every Christian there is, spiritually

speaking, a throne and a cross. Christ and self are contending for the throne. When one of them sits on the throne, automatically the other is nailed to the cross. Who is nailed to the cross in your life -- Christ or self? Don't just give Christ place or prominence, but give Him the pre-eminence in your life. Place Him above self, family, friends, business, and everything else as He wants you to do. If you will place Christ first in your living, giving, working, and hoping, you will discover that your life will be one of boundless possibilities, unending victories, and unspeakable joy.

Our Lord needs and wants your body through which to work, your heart to throb with concern and compassion, your mind through which to think, your eyes through which to see others and their needs, your ears to listen to His commands, your feet with which to walk, your hands with which to work, and your tongue with which to speak His message to others. Christ wants your body, yea your whole being, to be placed entirely at His disposal. Let Him love with your heart, walk with your feet, work with your hands, smile through your face, and speak with your tongue. Let Him seek sinners through you, inspire believers through you, and comfort saints through you until the day breaks and the shadows flee away. Sincerely say, in the words of Isaac Watts,

"Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small:
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all."