

GOD'S REQUIREMENTS OF YOU

"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. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."
Romans 12:1-2.

It is interesting to watch a baseball game between two teams of amateurs, whose members play for fun, but with a tremendous determination to win. When the batter comes up for his turn at bat, it does not matter what the situation is — how many scores, how many men on bases, how many strikes, balls, or outs — he has only one thought; and that is to drive the ball over the back field fence and make a grand home run. So the batter swings at the ball with all the power he can muster, putting every ounce of his strength into the effort. That may not be good baseball strategy, but it is a magnificent demonstration of aiming for the best.

In like manner, every Christian should aim the highest and best. The ones who do will find in the words of our text a powerful challenge to godly living, a ringing call to reach higher ground.

Unfortunately most Christians have never proved "what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God," but are living on something less than God's best.

Many professing Christians are living unhappily on spiritual lowlands only slightly above the level of the unregenerate world, without "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding," and without that heavenly lift which is the soul of happiness.

Some are trying to be Christian in a mild sort of way, vainly trying to find happiness without holiness. Thus they live their pinched, meager little lives, and die their little deaths, and are laid in their little graves, without ever experiencing the "abundant life" which is the unceasing concern and desire of the Saviour, Who came "that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."

All who seriously aspire to God's best will find tremendous help in the remarkable statements of our text which reveals the way to it and spells out His requirements for reaching this desired goal.

Complete Dedication.

"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."

1. God requires the presentation of the body.

(1) How do we serve our Lord?

We serve Him with our bodies, which are the instruments of every vice and every virtue. Each of us must serve Him with the body — with the feet going where He would have us go, with the eyes seeing what He would have us to see, with the ears hearing what He would have us to hear, with the hands doing what He would have us to do, and with the tongue speaking what He would have us to speak.

(2) How do we serve Satan?

It is with the body — the mind thinking about what is repugnant to the Holy Spirit, the will choosing to do that which is contrary to His will, the eyes

seeing that which He does not want seen, the ears hearing what He does not want heard, the feet walking where He does not want them to go, and the hands doing what He does not want done -- that Satan is served.

The presentation of the body as a living sacrifice is reasonable on the ground of our redemption, and of our participation in the life of Christ. "What! know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (I Corinthians 6:19-20).

"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."

All of us, who are God's children, must decide what kind of a Christian life we shall live. We are faced with two alternatives. One is that of a life of self-choosing, self-pleasing, and self-indulgence. It is a life in which Christ may have place, or even prominence, but not the pre-eminence. The other is that of a life absolutely yielded to Christ, where His will alone is sought and obeyed, and where self-will is crucified and self-pleasing is renounced.

Two things are to be observed about the statement, "that ye present your bodies," namely, that it is to be an instantaneous act, done now, once and for all, never to be repeated, and, secondly, the presentation of the body to God is a voluntary, definite, intelligent, and loving act of dedication.

Each Christian should present his body to the Lord because of what Christ has done for him, because of what Christ desires to do in him, and because of what Christ wants to do through him. It is His prerogative to choose your place, be it eminent or obscure; to select your task, be it important or insignificant. Christ is looking for instruments that He can use. It is the human surrender that releases the divine power.

David Livingstone said, "I give Him everything, but what a pity that I have so little to give." But no gift is small if God receives and uses it. 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 we learn that the extent of one's usefulness is the measure of his surrender. Lovely Florence Nightingale was asked the secret of her power. She replied: "The secret is I work very hard, and I never have refused Christ anything." Such complete dedication is sorely needed in these days.

My body is the house of my soul. I live in it. I work through it. I think with my mind. I see with my eyes. I walk with my feet. I work with my hands. I talk with my tongue. Christ wants my body. He wants my mind with which to think, my eyes with which to see, my feet with which to walk, my hands with which to work, and my tongue with which to speak. By yielding my body to Him, he has an instrument with which to work.

II. Complete Separation.

"And be not conformed to this world." Unfortunately, the chief object of many is to do whatever the crowd is doing. They think, act, and live according to the dictates of custom. Their justification for their fashions, conversations, and amusements is the silly statement that "everybody is doing it."

Our text challenges us to "stop being fashioned" according to the spirit of our age. Our Lord does not want us to take this age as our fashion plate. He calls us to walk the path of separation from the pattern of this age.

III. Complete Transformation.

"But be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." Note what a tremendous change one syllable can make. Both "conformed" and "transformed" imply a change. Each implies assuming another shape or character. But the contrast is far greater than the likeness. One means a change which is only superficial, external, and imitative; whereas the other is inward, deep, and growing from the inner life to the outer life.

You cannot transform yourself. "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (I Corinthians 2:14). Regardless of how you may strain for vision and discernment, you are helpless until the transforming grace of God does His work. You cannot change yourself from a sinner to a saint, or elevate yourself to higher ground. But you can open your heart and life to the One Who "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think."

James L. Kraft, the renowned Christian layman, recalls as a great turning point in his life the day that a certain kindly eye doctor came into his life. James was a fourteen year old boy, one of a family of eleven children, living on a farm in Canada. He said that he had never been able to distinguish objects clearly. His nearsightedness was so acute and so distressing that he assumed everyone on earth suffered continuously from terrible headaches, and that all the earth had the blurry image of a boat seen from under water. It happened that the oculist was vacationing in the vicinity, and young James was taking care of his horse and buggy. Noting his extreme nearsightedness, the oculist insisted that the boy go to the city with him to be fitted with a pair of glasses. In that gift of glasses, Kraft gratefully recalled, "he gave me the earth and all that was in it, completely in focus and beautiful beyond anything I could have dreamed... I cannot think of another act of human kindness in my lifetime which can compare with his." It was not possible for the boy to transform himself, but it was quite possible for him to be transformed.

Did you ever consider the beauty of the blossom of a water lily? It is one of the loveliest of flowers. But it grows in the dirtiest of mud. It is pure white, but it makes its whiteness out of the slime and mire at the bottom of the lake. It is not conformed to the soil in which it grows, but it is transformed into a far higher beauty. Are you a conformer or a transformer?

If there is an inward change, an outward transformation will certainly reveal it. The face will reflect the heart. No man or woman can reach the thirtieth year of life without having the past sculptured on the face. The sculptor that fashions the face is thought. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he."

While it is your responsibility to be transformed you cannot do the transforming. The work is not yours, but the Holy Spirit will do for you what you can never do for yourself. When your mind is brought into line with the mind of God the transformation takes place. When you yield yourself to Him He will do the work in and through you. The Holy Spirit works through the renewing of the mind, causing you to want to please the Lord, and enabling you to do so.

What is the source of all your complaints, murmurings, and rebellious feelings? All of these things grow out of the fact that you say, "Let my will be done rather than

God's will." They grow out of the desire in your heart to subordinate His will to your will. Nothing is wrong with God's will. If you will do His will, you will enjoy a victorious and useful Christian experience.

"But we never can prove the delights of His love,
Until all on the altar we lay;
For the favor He shows, and the joy He bestows,
Are for them who will trust, and obey."

Sir Titus Salt, a man of millions, one Sunday heard a preacher teach that soul rest and satisfaction are to be found in Christ alone. The minister said that he sat in his garden and watched the caterpillars climbing the painted sticks; he had seen them reach the top and look this way and that in search of some juicy twig on which to feed, only to be disappointed, and to return slowly and wearily to the ground again. "There are the painted sticks of pleasure, wealth, power, and fame. All these are calling to men and saying 'Climb me, and you will achieve the desire of your heart... Climb me, and so find satisfaction.'" Afterward the millionaire said to the preacher, "I want to tell you that I have been climbing painted sticks, and am today a weary man. Is there any rest for a weary millionaire?" The preacher assured him that there was, and he found it that day in Jesus Christ. Unsaved friend, receive Christ as your Saviour now, and then live for Him as long as He permits you to remain on earth.