

The Law of Sacrifice

J.R. Miller:

"I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship." Romans 12:1

We are taught to present our bodies, as a living sacrifice unto God. Ancient offerings were brought to the altar, and presented dead. But the Christian sacrifice is not to be presented dead—it is to be given to God alive. The life, instead of being consumed in a holocaust, or poured out in a bloody oblation, is to be given to God for service. Christ came to give life to his followers, to give life in abundance. This call to consecration is therefore a call to life at its best. The whole twelfth chapter of Romans may be considered as an interpretation and the filling out of the thought of a "living sacrifice" which Paul calls us at the beginning to make. The wonderful teaching which follows in Romans 12, explains what these two words mean.

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Romans 12:2. We are not to be fashioned according to this world—but are to be transformed into the divine beauty. Our life is to be one of service, of love, of devotion.

We talk a great deal about the love of Christ—but we can help the world to know what that love of Christ is, only when in our daily lives—we illustrate it and reproduce it. It is our great mission in life—to make Jesus Christ appear beautiful to others. It was said of an earnest, unselfish man, that by his own life of devotion, he made people fall in love with Jesus Christ. It was said of an old minister who had retired from active service—that it was worth all his salary just to have him live in the town. His life was such a revealing of the life of Christ—that wherever he went, it was like the shining there of a soft, gentle light.

We are to present our bodies to God as living sacrifices—living, we must remember, not dead. To be dead is to have no more power to do anything. A little child was talking one day in the country about what it was to be dead. His mother was trying to explain death to him. He was shown a bumblebee that was not living, and then was asked what it was to be dead. He said: "Not going any more." The child's effort at interpretation was really good. To be dead is to be not going any more, to be without life, without power to do anything. We are called to be living sacrifices.

To be alive, then, is to be going, to be active. All true life has in it the quality of sacrifice. We cannot love really—and not make sacrifices. "God so loved the world—that he gave." Love always gives—nothing is love, that will not give. Two people cannot live together ideally in the sacred relation of marriage, and not live sacrificially. There can be no friendship worthy of the name, without sacrifice. Friendship always costs—its cost often is very great; we never know what we are engaging to do when we say to a person, "I will be your friend." We cannot do good to others in any effective way, without forgetting and denying self in life.

We must strive to repeat in our own lives, in our own measure—the sweetness, the charity, the kindness and the helpfulness of Jesus Christ. The cross is everywhere. It has been said that one of the best rules for every-day life—is to try always to be a little kinder than is necessary; that is, to be a little more self-forgetful than we are required to be, a little more patient, to go two miles when we are required to go only one. The more of the sacrificial quality we get into our life—the diviner and the lovelier will it be.

When we use the word sacrifice, we think first of the great sacrifice of Christ—which is both the model for all Christian life, and also its inspiration. Everything good and beautiful gets its motive from the life of Christ, which shone with the holiest spirit of sacrifice. We look at his six hours on the cross when we speak of Christ's sacrifice, as if that were its one great act and expression. But the cross was not endured by Christ merely during those six hours on Calvary; it was in all his life, in every day and hour of it. Everything he did was in love, and love is always a living sacrifice. He was always denying himself.

We do not have to be crucified on pieces of wood—to bear a cross. When you gave up your own way yesterday for another's sake, when you kept sweet and patient under insult or wrong that hurt you deeply, when you did a kindness to one who had spoken injuriously of you, when you went out of your way to do some gentle thing of love, in return for an unkindness—you were making a living sacrifice. On all his days, Christ made his life sacrificial. On Calvary, he only wrote the word out in capitals!

Ian Maclaren, speaking of the cross, says: "Theological science has shown an unfortunate tendency to monopolize the cross until the symbol of salvation has been lifted out of the ethical setting of the Gospels, and planted in an environment of doctrine alone." The cross stands not merely for the sufferings of Christ endured

in redeeming sinnersâ€”but also for the law of love and of sacrifice in every department of Christian living. It is not enough to have the cross on our churches, as a symbol of redemption, or to wear crucifixes as ornaments; the cross and the crucifix must be in the heartâ€”and manifested in the life!

The cross must be in the lives of those who follow Christ, not branded on their bodiesâ€”but wrought into their character, their disposition, their conduct, their spirit! We cannot live a Christian life for a day, without coming to points of sacrifice. The cross of Christ does not take our own cross from usâ€”Christ does not bear our cross for us. His cross becomes the law of our life, and makes it all sacrificial. Every beautiful thing in Christian morals and Christian ethics, reveals the cross. The Beatitudes are all sacrificial. No one can live the thirteenth of First Corinthians and not crucify self continually.

All sacrifice at length, blossoms into Christlike beauty, sweetness and joy. Never be afraid to lose your life in loveâ€”you will find it again. Our sacrifices are transformed by the sacrifice of Christ and the discipline of life. The godly life, is not the one that has known only ease, pleasure, self-indulgence. The iron that is dug out of the hills as ore is not yet ready to be used. It is only ore and has to be put through the glowing furnace where it is transformed into something of great value. The same is true of manhood.

Some of us are forever complaining about the hardness of dutyâ€”that we have to make so many sacrifices for others, that we have to bear so many burdens, that we have to give up so many pleasant things that others may have them, that we have to suffer so much that others may not suffer. Will we never learn the secret, that all our blessings, our sweetest joys, our richest comfortsâ€”come out of the very things that we so chafe and fret over?

We are called to present our bodies as living sacrifices to God. The sacrifices are not to be made, however, for their own sake. This is the law of life in Christ. This is one of the ways Christ is saving the world.

Watkinson relates that in a London auction, there was a large sale of all kinds of badges of honorâ€”silver stars, gold crosses, jeweled medals celebrating heroisms on many historic fields. These were all marks of honor for those who had won them. They were noble decorations for those on whose uniforms they had been pinned as tokens of personal worth or of costly achievement. But imagine anyone buying these badges at an auction and then pinning them on his own shirt and wearing them out among men. What could they mean to him? He had not won them. They would have been only tawdriest tinsel to him.

Other people's living sacrifices can bring no honor for us. They must be our own; the honors must be won by our own courage, faith and sacrifice. Some people like others to make the sacrifices for themâ€”and then let them get the honor. A great humorist in the days of the Civil War used to talk of how many of his relatives he had given to his country's service. Some Christian people like to urge and inspire others to make sacrifices, to give and sufferâ€”while they do nothing of the kind themselves! But we never can have other people's badges of sacrifice or decorations of honor pinned upon us. You must present your own body as a living sacrifice to Godâ€”your own, not another's. You must bear the cross in your own life!