

BEING PREPARED THROUGH BEING A LIVING SACRIFICE

Romans 12:1-5—I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritually intelligent service and worship. And be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

For I say, through the grace that was given me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but so to think as to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to each man a measure of faith. For even as we have many members in one body, and all the members have not the same office: so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and severally members one of another.

Mark 8:31-35—And [Jesus] began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders, and the chief priest, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he spake the saying openly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him. But he turning about, and seeing his disciples, rebuked Peter, and saith, Get thee behind me, Satan; for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men. And he called unto him the multitude with his disciples, and said unto them, If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever would save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's shall find it.

Shall we pray:

Beloved Lord, we thank You that we have been here in Your presence worshipping You, sensing that You are indeed present. Lord, we now want to ask You as we come to the ministry of Your Word that we shall know in the speaking and the hearing of Your word Your anointing. You have dearly won that anointing for us. You have made the anointing a living reality in the Person of the outpoured Holy Spirit. Into that anointing we stand by faith that this time may not just be a natural physical time of our gathering together but may truly be a meeting with Yourself. Lord, speak to us. Touch us we pray, especially in the light of these days that we are considering. This we ask in the name of our Messiah the Lord Jesus. Amen.

The Bible Is the Word of God

I have spoken about the fact that there is absolutely no way that you and I can have a heart that longs for the coming of the Lord unless we recognize that the Bible is the Word of God. Somehow it has to sink into us that this extraordinary volume that we have, sixty-six books of writings, is actually the Word of God. It has come to us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. And in the most wonderful way, it is through this living Word that we are saved through the finished work of our Messiah, the Lord Jesus. The only way we can be ready and prepared for the coming of the Lord is through this Word of Christ dwelling in us—not visiting us, not using us, not blessing us at some point and then leaving us, but by this Word of Christ dwelling in us.

James puts it, “receiving the implanted word.” That gives the idea that this Word of God is alive; it is almost like a living organism. It takes root in the soil of our spirit and then it begins to grow, and not only grow but there is fruit as a result of it.

This whole matter of the Word is so essential, especially in the days that we are living when there is such a colossal assault upon the authenticity of the Word of God, the inspiration of the Word of God, and the relevance of the Word of God. It would not surprise me if in the next months or certainly years they discover something that proves in their eyes that we all came from primeval slime, and in some huge cosmic explosion—nothing to do with God—somehow or other the planets, the universes, everything appeared. I find it much simpler to believe in the Almighty God from whom everything has come that we see, touch, and taste.

In the end it is not the physical that matters. Behind the physical is the essential world or the eternal world. You cannot see the Lord Jesus at present enthroned at the Father’s right hand with these eyes. Yet that is *the* fact at this present moment in time. The wonderful thing is that God Himself is watching over history and determining its course until finally He fulfills His original purpose.

The Mercies of God

I find it amazing in Romans 12:1 that Paul gathers up everything he has been saying in the preceding chapters with these words, “I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy acceptable to God which is your spiritually intelligent worship and service.” We can be carried away by emotion and feelings, and worship the Lord. There is nothing wrong with that; we are human beings. But the spiritually intelligent worship and service is when we become a living sacrifice, holy and well-pleasing to God. Did you notice that I left out one word? “I beseech you *therefore*, brethren, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice.”

I always remember many years ago Dr. Lloyd-Jones saying to always take note of the *therefores*, the *wherefores*, the *abouts*, and the *hows* in the Word of God.

Why did he say “therefore”? Because behind this statement of his is this beseeching appeal to us all to be ready for whatever is coming in the end. These eleven chapters of this incredible letter which were inspired of God (as were all of the letters and books) are total and all consuming. Again: “I beseech you *therefore*, brethren, by the mercies of God ...” That is all that the Lord Jesus has done for us at Calvary—the work He has finished, the salvation He has wrought for us, and the mercy He continually shows to us. And by these mercies we are to present our bodies a living sacrifice. He uses the word “bodies,” which encompasses everything—our spirit, soul and body. The only way you and I can be prepared for what is coming on the face of the earth and above all for the coming of the Lord Jesus is to be a living sacrifice. But sadly, there are very few Christians saved by the grace of God, born of the Spirit of God, who are living sacrifices by His mercies.

This letter is the greatest exposition of the gospel in the sixty-six books and writings of the Bible. There is nothing else that touches this extraordinary inspired exposition of the gospel. From chapters 1-8, the apostle, by the Holy Spirit, expounds the gospel or the good news concerning God’s salvation to us; or to put it in simple words, the wonderful way in which the Spirit of God brings us to a spiritual birth.

Spiritual Seeing and Hearing

When you are born, if you are normal, you have eyes, ears, a heart, and a body—you are spirit, soul and body. At the beginning everybody is a small infant, and it is hard to believe that in some marvelous way we have grown up to what we are now. You could not walk or speak. You could just focus your eyes a little. You could hear, and after a while you could tell your mother's voice, your father's voice and the voice of other relatives and friends. Isn't it amazing to think that when you and I are born of the Spirit we have a spiritual hearing mechanism in our spirit? We have something in which we can receive from the Lord, and through this Book He can reveal something to us. We hear and we see.

What did the Lord Jesus say? "My sheep hear My voice and they follow Me." There is no way you can follow the Lord without hearing Him, and this may explain why so many of us get into a mess. We do not hear the Lord. It is amazing to me that the Lord Jesus said to all seven churches: "He that hath an ear to hear let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches." Do you really believe that you can hear the Spirit of God saying something to the church? And if the Lord has gone to such lengths to reach us, should we not have good spiritual hearing instead of suffering from what the Bible calls dullness of hearing which just means your ears are clogged? You have so much wax in your ears you cannot hear properly. This appeal of the apostle Paul in his expounding of the gospel by the Holy Spirit is so amazing to me.

The Goal of the Gospel Is to Become a Living Sacrifice

He very simply says that the goal, the aim, the climax of the gospel is that you and I should become living sacrifices. Now that falls very often on very deaf ears because we have this kind of gospel that is so often preached which says we are going to have a lovely cozy life, a very happy life with no suffering, no tribulations, and no problems; something is wrong when all that happens. But in actual fact, we are meant to come through all these problems and difficulties and tribulations and grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus. Every time you come through a period of problem or confusion and you hear the Lord and you see the Lord, you have grown. You are not the same; you have actually grown.

Did the apostle really mean that being a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God is the aim and goal of our salvation? If we are not a living sacrifice, our Christian life and our church life does not work. We become listless, lifeless, and heavy. Instead of being alive to the Lord and moving with Him, we are stationary. Can I put it very simply in a nutshell? The Christian life does not work until you are a living sacrifice. You have blocked everything the Lord has for you when you are not a living sacrifice. I know that some people will say what I am teaching is dreadful, absolutely awful. But without this strategic and necessary sacrifice, our Christian life is stationary. There is no growth; there is no moving on; there is nothing.

The Lord Has to Initiate a New Move When the Church Fails to Grow

We have only to look at church history to see how the Lord has launched initiative after initiative after initiative as the builder of the church to overcome this problem. So many

believers are not moving, not growing, not coming into a full understanding of the purpose of God. Then the Builder of the church, the glorified and risen Messiah Jesus launches a new initiative. Sometimes it was the Puritans, Motanists, Priscillians, Bogamils, Brethren and others. When He launched these initiatives, suddenly men and women became living sacrifices once again, holy and acceptable to God, and the whole world was changed by their testimony. Their lives were changed, society was changed, and nations were changed. The Word of God was put into the heart of those nations. But gradually, as always, things died, and it became denominational or organizational and the Lord had to do it all over again.

The first great evangelical awakening that swept millions into the kingdom of God was the Moravian revival that spread through the whole of Central Europe and indeed was in a very real way connected with the first great Evangelical awakening in America. We could speak of so much in the history of the church, but it is this desire of the Lord that we should grow in Him, that we should come to maturity, that we should have a spiritual understanding of His mind and heart. It all goes back to these words of the apostle Paul: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living sacrifice."

Spiritually Intelligent Worship and Service

Will you notice that I have used the word "which is your spiritually intelligent service and worship." Years ago when I was looking at this in the Greek, I could not understand the translation I had at the time which was "your reasonable service." Some people call it "your rational service. But the more I looked at it, the more I came to the conclusion that the Lord was saying something a little more than that. We had in the fellowship a Cambridge don who knew classical New Testament Greek. I went to him and said, "Brother, if I were to say, 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, totally and acceptable to God which is your spiritually intelligent worship,' would it be correct?" And he said, "Brother, that would exactly say what it means, but you must add one word: "your spiritually intelligent worship and service."

If that is true, it means that spiritually intelligent worship and spiritually intelligent service to the Lord begins when you and I become a living sacrifice, when we present our whole being as a living sacrifice.

Be Not Fashioned According to This World

Then he says, "And be not fashioned according to this world." Well, most of us naturally are fashioned according to this world. But it is "Be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (v. 2a). In other words, when you are prepared to be a living sacrifice, there is the possibility of a transformation taking place, a deliverance from the fashion of this world, the ways of the world, and the philosophy of this world. You are in some marvelous way being brought into a deep inward experience and knowledge of the Lord.

The Renewing of Our Mind

We need the renewing of our mind. Everything starts with our mind. It is no wonder that in the Old Testament God told the Jews to put the Word of God between their eyes. Let your brain and thinking process be under and ruled by the Word of God. We are naturally fashioned by this world and its philosophy. We get it all day every day in the media through the television, and now it is inside our educational system. It is out with anything Biblical and Christian and in with everything that is the fashion of this world.

Proving the Good and Acceptable Will of God

Then he says something just as remarkable, “that you may prove what is the good and acceptable will of God” (v. 2b). I am not sure that anyone can prove that God’s will is acceptable until they are a living sacrifice. It is important especially for the younger people, who are being absolutely bamboozled by the world around them. It comes at you in every way, not only in what you read, what you see on television, but even in the music. It is all the fashion and the philosophy of this world. But to be ready and prepared for the coming of the Lord, you have to take a new step. You have to come to the conclusion that you have to be a living sacrifice. Out of that comes a transformation, a renewing of our mind, and the ability to discover that the will of God far from being fearful and dreadful is marvelous; it is good and acceptable.

To do the will of God is the most vital thing that any person in this audience can do. When you read your Bible, think of those who did the will of God—Abraham, Moses, Samuel, David, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, John the Baptist, even the Messiah Himself who said, “I am come to do Thy will, O God.” That will of God meant Gethsemane for the Lord Jesus; it meant rejection for the Messiah. That will of God for Him was to die on the cross and to be made our sin. But the Lord Jesus endured the cross and has sat down at the right hand of God.

The will of God is not always wonderful. However, I do not want to give you the idea that it is dreadful, heavy, full of trouble, full of tribulation and problems. There are times when the will of God is joy; it is wonderful. It is like a wonderful summer’s morning full of blue sky and sun, joyful in the world around. But there are also times when we enter into great periods of distress and trouble.

When we are not a living sacrifice, the enemy comes, and he breathes into us all kinds of things such as he said to Eve: “Hath God said?” Can’t you see that he is trying to imprison you, to make you miserable? It is a wonderful deliverance from the prison of our self-life when we make a decision: “I will present my body a living sacrifice.”

A Two-fold Commitment

A Total Surrender of Our All to Christ

There is a two-fold commitment, and it is very simple. The first is a total surrender of our all to Christ under His absolute Lordship. Some people want the Lord Jesus to be like a cleaning lady, coming up behind them cleaning up the mess they made, making them happy. Even better than that, they want Him to be a kind of person who gets you through when you are in trouble. That is all you want. You do not want to be under the Lordship of Jesus. You want Him to be behind you pushing you.

Moses once said to the Lord: “If Your presence go not with us, carry us not up hence.” And the Lord said to him: “My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.” In Hebrew, there is no “with us.” But our translators could not understand how it could make sense that Moses should say to God: “If You do not carry us up, we will not go.” So they put in “You be with us.” Then when the Lord said, “My presence shall go,” they added “with you and I will give you rest.” But in the Hebrew there is no “with you.” What the Lord was simply saying and this goes to the very heart of this matter of being a living sacrifice: “It is not that I am going to go and you are going to attach yourself to Me or I am going to be your helper, your supporter, your this or that. It is rather “You are going to be with Me. My presence will go and you go with Me. When I go, you go. When I stop, you stop.”

Do you remember the pillar of cloud and fire? Whenever it stopped, they stopped. Whenever it moved, they moved. It is the same idea. You see, the idea in modern Christianity is that somehow we are the real center of everything and the Lord is behind us to clean up the mess we get ourselves into, to bless us, support us, and financially take care of us. Actually the Word of God is very different. What it really says is this: “You must be with the Lord. He is the Worker, you are the coworker. He is the Builder you are the co-builder. You are under His direction and under His Lordship. This matter of total commitment to the Lord lies at the heart of everything.

C. T. Studd

I came to the Lord through C.T. Studd. He was the first Christian that I had ever read about who was one hundred per cent a living sacrifice. Everyone called themselves a Christian at school and elsewhere that I knew, but they knew the Lord as one who was a helper to them, a supporter of them, going behind them and cleaning up the mess they had made. To me it was a revelation when I found someone who was a total sacrifice. It was no wonder God was with him.

He said on one occasion, “If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him.” Did you hear it? No sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him.

Nicolaus count Zinzendorf

When Nicolaus count Zinzendorf, who had known the Lord Jesus from childhood and loved Him, went into that German museum and saw an oil painting of Jesus, he stood a couple of hours before it transfixed. The Lord Jesus had blood trickling down His face from the crown of thorns, and underneath were the words in German, “I have done all this for thee, what hast thou done for Me?” It was at that moment that Nicolaus count Zinzendorf gave himself totally to the Lord Jesus. From that came the great Moravian revival—the hundred-years’ prayer meeting, the two hundred twenty-six mission stations all over the world where believers had not gone before—to the Arctic, to the Eskimos, to the roof of the world in Tibet, to lepers that no Christians would touch for fear of contracting leprosy, to the slaves that were being taken from Africa to the new world and Britain; everywhere they went.

In the end it is this being a living sacrifice that is the key to genuine service. It is the key to genuine worship, not just emotional but genuine worship.

A Total Surrender of Our Will

What is the second commitment? It is also total—a total surrender of our will to His will. Do you remember what Satan said to Eve? “Hath God said you shall surely die? You will not die. You will be as gods knowing good from evil.” In other words, you will not have to be dependent upon the Lord. You will have within yourself your own power and your own government. In other words, your will will be enthroned. That was the beginning of the fall of mankind. And ever since when we look through history, we find this question of the will everywhere—dictators, ghastly kings, great theories that have enslaved millions of people, and behind it all is the human will.

To be a living sacrifice is not only to be surrendered to His Lordship, it means for the first time you are ready to do anything He asks of you and to go anywhere He sends you. I think this question of the will lies at the root of all our problems as believers. We do not really want the will of the Lord. We even have this idea that the will of the Lord is dreadful; that He will just make us miserable; that God has a kind of factory for making people unhappy and miserable. It is all a terrible lie from the pit itself.

Your will is the problem that stops you from growing in the Lord. Listen young people, it is your will that is the problem because you want to be the boss. You want to be the one who decides. Oh, you will go here and there in the world doing things, but you want to decide

To surrender our will to His will is one of the hardest things that we as human beings can do. But when you are saved by the grace of God, born of the Holy Spirit of God, your will can be the destruction of your spiritual growth to maturity until you make the decision: “I am going to will His will.” Without these two commitments there can be no real worship and no real service and no real overcoming, no being transformed by the renewing of your mind.

The Self-Life Is to Come Under New Management

The problem is not only sin; the problem is self. Most people who read their New Testament do not realize this problem. I read to you from Mark chapter 8. The Lord Jesus said, “If any man follow Me, let him deny himself (the Greek is ‘disown himself’), take up his cross and follow Me” (v. 34b) Let me put it another way. “If any man follow Me, let him give up all right to himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.” Then He said, “If you try to save your life, you will lose it. If you lose your life for My sake and the gospel, you will find it” (v. 35). This word *life* in Greek *pauche* is the word we get psychology or psychiatry from and it just means soul.

The Lord said, “If any man tries to preserve his self-life, he will lose it; but if a man lets go of his self-life for My sake and the gospel’s, he will discover his self-life under new management. It is not that God destroys your self-life; rather He will give it back to you under new management. It is as simple as that.

This was the first time the Lord Jesus actually said to the disciples: "I am going to die. I am going to be taken by the chief priests and the scribes and they will kill Me, and on the third day I will rise again." They had never heard such a thing before.

Now Peter was always saying what the others thought. They were very clever because they kept their big mouths shut; but Peter was the kind of person who always blurted out exactly what he felt. And he took Jesus aside and rebuked Him and said: "Never! You are the Messiah; You cannot say that You are going to be killed. I will not allow it. While I am here, it will not happen." And Jesus looked into his eyes and said, "Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou mindest not the things of God but the things of men."

If I were to say to you looking straight into your eyes: "Get behind me Satan," you would go straight to one of the brothers here and say, "Never ask that brother back again. Do you know what he said? He looked straight into my eyes and said, "Get thee behind me, Satan." How could he possibly have called me Satan?

What the Lord Jesus was really saying was this: "There is a self-life in you, Peter, and that self-life will not allow Me to go to the cross. The very reason for which I have come into this world, you would stop. You mind the things of men, not the things of God."

I am old enough now to have seen all kinds of things that have happened to Christians, to servants of the Lord, to workers, churches, assemblies, fellowships. The thing that destroys not only individual Christians but whole works of God, churches and fellowships is the self-life. Rivalries, jealousies, factions, divisions all come from the self-life. We think the gospel is only to do with sin, but Jesus died for our sins. Of course, He died for our sins and God forgives us because He became sin in our place. He bore our sins in His body on the tree. But what we do not realize is that when the Lord Jesus was crucified, our self-life was crucified with Him. You can have all your sins forgiven, but if your self-life is not dealt with it can wreck a fellowship, a work of God, a ministry. That is why many begin in the spirit and end in the flesh.

This is the other half of the gospel. Why do you think Jesus did not gather those disciples together with Peter and sit them down and say, "Listen, I want to tell you that this self-life is a problem. It has manifested itself in Peter and I want you all to understand what a problem it is. But He called the whole multitude together as if this was to do with the central theme of the gospel and said to them: "If any man seeks to preserve his self-life, he will lose it. It will rot; it will decompose, and others will be diseased. But if he loses his self-life for My sake and the gospel's, the same shall find it. It will be given back under new management, the management of God.

Jesus Carried Our Self-Life with Him to the Cross

The point is this: when Jesus died, He not only died for our sins, He died and carried our self-life with Him to the cross. Listen to the apostle Paul: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me: and the life that I now live, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me" (see Galatians 2:20). That is the gospel. Here you have the other side of it. "I have been crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I but Christ liveth in me." My self-life is under new management.

I have been all over the world speaking to young people, and everywhere I went, the most common question I was asked was this: "How can I live the Christian life?" I heard it in New

Zealand, in Australia, in the United States, in Canada, and every country in Europe: “How can I live the Christian life?” I was told again and again that it is so hard to live the Christian life; it is impossible. I always answered in the same manner: “You are asking the wrong question. It is not how you can live the Christian life; it is how you can die. If you learn how to die, the Christian life will take care of itself. It means this: you die, and that life of the Lord Jesus will course through you. How do you get resurrection life and power? Everyone wants resurrection life and power. Where does it come from? It comes from the death of the Lord Jesus. But when He died, He took you with Him. That resurrection life and power that comes through us is so amazing because it stems from the death of the Lord Jesus and my death.

Two of you are having a bitter arguments. One says dreadful things about the other and the other comes back with beastly things. He goes around everywhere criticizing that person and running them down. How can you get over that? You get more and more bitter, and more and more you try to find reasons why you are right and so and so is wrong. Why don’t you die?

I always tell people when they have a big argument, especially between two men, you die and the Lord will take your place. The Lord will deal with this other brother who is ruining your reputation and your name, and that is exactly what happens. I have seen it with countless brothers.

Half the problems in fellowships is backbiting, gossip, faction, rumblings, criticisms, character assassination. I remember the old Puritan Divine who said, “You take care of a good conscience, and God will take care of your good name.” That is why you can die. The Lord loves you so much you can just go down and He will take your place. Woe betide that other person who will come up against the Lord the next time.

The Christian Life Does Not Work Unless We Die

The Christian life only works when we are prepared to die. It may sound strange, but it is the principle of Calvary. When you are prepared to die, the Christian life blossoms. How can we be prepared for the coming of the Lord? By giving up all right to ourselves and taking up our cross and following Him; by a total surrender of our life to Him; and by a total surrender of our will to His will. If these words of mine sink into you, however young you are, you will begin a journey today that will end in the throne of God. As we get older, and I speak from experience, we get more irritated with people. We do not put up so easily with them as when we were younger. No matter how old you are, you have to learn this lesson, that the only way the Christian life can grow is when you are out of the way. Your self-life is the problem.

S-i-n—I is in the center. Let that I be crucified in the same way He has born your sin. Let that I be taken out, and let the Lord begin to reveal Himself to you and in you and make you the kind of child of God that you should be, the servant of God you should be, and the worshipper that you should be. Is there any other way to be prepared for the coming of the Lord? When He comes and finds that we have only been interested in ourselves and in our own well-being, and we had no idea of service, we will not be prepared. The church was there for us, not us for the church.

Many Members but One Body

However, if you are ready to present your body a living sacrifice, before long, you will find that you are in the body of the Lord Jesus—many members but one body. Then you begin to discover your place in the family of God. You begin to discover what may be the gift that God has given you. It is all here in the twelfth chapter that begins with “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living sacrifice.”

A little further on we find that we are many members but one body. That is fellowship. The Greek word for fellowship is *koinonia* which means sharing what we have in common. What do we have in common? It is not race, nor social class, nor color, nor education; so what do we have in common? It is the Lord Jesus. Everyone who is born of God, the Lord Jesus lives in us and we live in Him. Then I suddenly discover that the same Lord Jesus in me is the same Lord Jesus in you; but I am Jewish and you are Gentile. And suddenly I discover the Jewish side is gone and the Gentile side is gone. I find Christ in you and you find Christ in me. You may be as black as coal and someone else may be as white as milk, but we have the same Christ. Whether you are black, pink, yellow or white, there is only one Christ.

Our Fellowship Is In Christ

How do we find this amazing fellowship? Only when we become living sacrifices. The sacrifice in the olden day was burnt to a cinder; it was a burnt offering. Are you prepared for that challenge? However young you are, however old you are, are you ready for that challenge? Settle it today. Settle it in your heart, because we may not have much more time. Settle it, and let the Lord touch you and do something in you and in me and in us all.

Why should there not be another awakening that could sweep through these once called Christian countries? It happened before; it could happen again. But where are the believers that are prepared to pay the price? The price is your self-life; the price is your well-being. May God help you to make the right decision. You will not regret it. However young you are or however old you may be, say to the Lord: “I want to present my body a living sacrifice; fill me with your Holy Spirit; help me Lord,” and He will. May God bless you.