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## The True Nonconformist Christian

*"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.*

The word "therefore" leads us to the start of the practical section of the epistle, that of applying the truths Paul has set forth in chapters 1-11.

How practical and useful the gospel is! It is that heavenly ointment whereby the wounds and bruises of sin are mollified. (Isaiah 1:6.) Unlike the ointments compounded by men which are very limited in their applications, serving only to address one or maybe two ailments, the gospel ointment is universal. It treats all of man's ills and that most successfully. So said Isaiah the prophet and Peter the apostle. "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed," Isaiah 53:5 "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed," 1 Peter 2:24. Healing from our sins comes through Christ the Ointment of Heaven.

The first application of the truths that Paul has set down in the previous eleven chapters is found in the exhortation, "Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

Please learn that:

### I. OUR FIRST RESPONSE TO THE GOSPEL OUGHT TO BE OUR PRESENTING OURSELVES TO THE LORD

Total surrender ought to be the outcome of conversion to Christ. Saul of Tarsus uttered those memorable words as heavenly light dawned upon his soul and he looked upon the face of Christ: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Acts 9:6. Yielding to Christ is the first inclination grace works in our heart.

The meaning of the word "present" is given by comparing its use in other places. In Mark 14:47 it is found under the English word, 'by'. "And one of them that stood by drew a sword, and smote a servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear." It suggests that which "stands close by". Thus we come close to the Lord to give Him ourselves. It is linked to "harvest" in Mark 4:29. "But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come." Here the English translation is "come". Presenting ourselves to the Lord is the harvest of the workings of God within us. It is the fruit of the gospel grace. We come unto God. The meaning of the word is further explained for us in Luke 2:22. "And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord." Mary, in company with Joseph, offered the child Jesus to the Lord. He was all they had and they freely obeyed the Law and gave Him to the Lord.

Here is what we are required to do in response to gospel mercy.

### II. THE REASON WHY WE SHOULD SO YIELD OURSELVES.

The reason Paul sets forth why we should surrender ourselves to the Lord is "by the mercies of God." The word "by" carries the meaning of "for the sake of". See how the same word is used in Matthew 24:9. "Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake." The same use of the word is seen in verse 22 of that same chapter in Matthew. "And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened."

Paul uses the same form of words in order to incite obedience and surrender to the Lord in other places. "Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me," Romans 15:30. "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the



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name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment," 1 Corinthians 1:10.

What a powerful inducement to surrender are "the mercies of God."

**1. The word "mercies" refers to the grace or "undeserved favour" of God.** The plural is used because they are so many such mercies. "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort," 2 Corinthians 1:3.

God the Father is the fountainhead of mercy and love toward the elect. He thinks only of mercy regarding them. "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end," Jeremiah 29:11. God never acts in anything other than mercy when dealing with His people. Even when He chastens us it is out of mercy, out of love toward us. "And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons," Hebrews 12:5-8.

**2. The essence of God's character is 'Mercy' and it is in response to His dealings with us that we yield ourselves.** It is what He asks of us. "What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me?" Psalm 116:12. The answer is clear. "And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might," Deuteronomy 6:5. "My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways," Proverbs 23:26.

A contemplation of God's mercy toward us will work surrender in our hearts, even as it did with the one who refused his freedom because his master treated him so well. "And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee. And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty: thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the LORD thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to day. And it shall be, if he say unto thee, I will not go away from thee; because he loveth thee and thine house, because he is well with thee; then thou shalt take an aul, and thrust it through his ear unto the door, and he shall be thy servant for ever. And also unto thy maidservant thou shalt do likewise. It shall not seem hard unto thee, when thou sendest him away free from thee; for he hath been worth a double hired servant to thee, in serving thee six years: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all that thou doest," Deuteronomy 15:12-18. If the kindness of a good man can work such surrender how much more the wonderful mercies of the Lord which we enjoy every day. "For great is thy mercy toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell," Psalm 86:13. "It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness," Lamentations 3:22-23.

Every morning supplies us with further reason to bow down in humble submission at the feet of our Saviour, the Lord Jesus.

**3. The particular mercy that Paul had in mind was most likely that which he had referred to in Romans 5:6-8.** "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." God has exhibited or showed His love; His kind feeling; His beneficence; His willingness to submit to sacrifice to do good to others, in this unusual and remarkable manner. He gave His only begotten Son to die for us while we were yet sinners, rebels living in defiance of Him. Christ died for us. In our stead; to save us from death, He took our place; and, by dying Himself on the cross, saved us from dying eternally in hell. In this, His love surpasses all that has ever been manifested among men. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us,



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and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins," 1 John 4:10.

What a powerful influence this truth ought to exert on us! What an incentive to presenting ourselves unto the Lord this is! How can we contemplate these words without falling down before the Lord in total, grateful submission.

### III. TRUE DEVOTION TO GOD REQUIRES A PRESENTING OF OURSELVES.

**1. The word used here commonly denotes the action of bringing and presenting an animal or other sacrifice before an altar.** The Old Testament believer, moved by a sense of love and gratitude to God for all His kindness, came to the altar with his gift and offered it freely unto the Lord as He had ordained. "I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people," Psalm 116:17-18. In thanksgiving for all the Lord has done the soul is moved to offer a sacrifice and the sacrifice required of us today is an offering of ourselves. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice."

**2. It entails a total relinquishing of all claim of ownership or control.** A total giving up of ourselves. The sacrifice at the Old Testament altar was never retrieved or returned. It was a total surrender. Even so it must be with us today.

**3. We are a living sacrifice.** In contrast to the dead body of an animal that was offered of old, we are required to offer a 'living, breathing sacrifice', even ourselves. They are the "active powers" of our being that are offered.

Notice too that it is an ongoing sacrifice. A dead animal can be offered only once. Ours is a continuing sacrifice. Paul helps us understand that with those profound words in Galatians 2:20. "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." We offer ourselves, we die to ourselves and our ambitions and our desires so that Christ can live out through us. "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

God help us to understand and enter upon this experience.

**4. It is a 'holy' sacrifice.** We are to consecrate to God our best faculties; the rigour of our minds, and talents, and time. Not the feebleness of sickness; not our old age alone; not time which we cannot otherwise employ; but the first vigour and energies of the mind and body — our youth, and health, and strength. For this cause we were regenerated. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them," Ephesians 2:10.

We are falling far short of the purpose for which we were created and saved if we are not totally yielded to Christ.

**5. It is to be an 'acceptable' sacrifice.** We must offer what God has specified, our entire being and not try to offer a substitute! Ananias and Sapphira come to mind. "But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, and kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things," Acts 5:1-5.

Ananias and Sapphira were not required by God to give all of the price they had received for the sale of their possession. No, part of the price would have been most acceptable. What was not acceptable was the offering of part pretending that it was the whole of the price received. That was a deceitful offering, an unholy, blemished sacrifice and as such most offensive to God.



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The Passover Lamb was a lamb "without blemish, a male of the first year," Exodus 12:5. Likewise we must offer ourselves without the blemish of reluctance or grudgingly or unwillingly, but freely, wholeheartedly and joyfully.

**6. It is our 'reasonable' service.** This can be misunderstood. That word 'reasonable' denotes that which pertains to the mind, and a reasonable service means that which is mental, or pertaining to our spiritual being. The worship of the Christian is that which pertains to the mind, or the spirit. The Old Testament worshiper had an external element to his worship with which he was tempted to be content. Men today tend toward the same folly, being content with the outward form of worship, the ritual of which men are so fond. But that is not what God requires of us. "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth," John 4:24.

Chrysostom renders the phrase, "your reasonable service" as "your spiritual ministry."

#### IV. SUCH A YIELDING WILL LEAVE A VERY DISTINCT MARK UPON US.

"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," verse 2.

**1. Our appearance and our walk will indicate our yielding.** We will be very different from the world. The word 'world' here refers to this 'age'. In appearance, in attitude and in actions the yielded believer will be very different from all the activities that are going on around them. Peter states the same truth in 1 Peter 1:14. "As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance." He says do not 'conform' yourselves to how it was you used to live.

Dear Christian, there ought to be a very clear distinction between us and the ungodly around us.

The reference to "ignorance" is a reference to that state of mind we once were in when unsaved. "This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart," Ephesians 4:17-18. The yielded Christian will not look or act like the unsaved!

**2. We will be marked by a wonderful ongoing transformation.** The word 'transformed' appears in other places in the New Testament which will show us its full meaning. Here are two of them:

A - "And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light," Matthew 17:2.

What a marvellous change the Saviour underwent before the eyes of the apostles!

B - "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord," 2 Corinthians 3:18.

It is the transformation that is the outworking of the sanctifying power of the Holy Ghost.

**3. Only the yielded, transformed believer can experience that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.** The renewed mind is governed by the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God. Being yielded, we carry out the commands of God as would the "slave" of long ago. Such a slave had no will only that of his master.

Remember that the word "servant" in the New Testament in such places as Matthew 25:21: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant," means in truth a "bondslave"!



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The Christian is guided and controlled only by the will of his Master, the Lord Jesus.

This is God's will for us all.

"Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life," Romans 6:4.

"Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof," Romans 13:13-14.

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new," 2 Corinthians 5:17.

"And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness," Ephesians 4:23-24.

"That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God," Colossians 1:10.

"That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God," 1 Peter 4:2.

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