

SOUTHERN
PRESBYTERIAN PULPIT:

A COLLECTION OF SERMONS

BY

MINISTERS OF THE SOUTHERN PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH.

Richmond, Va.:

THE PRESBYTERIAN COMMITTEE OF PUBLICATION.



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1896.

PRINTED BY
WHITTET & SHEPPERSON,
RICHMOND, VA.

CONSECRATION.

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"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 xii. 1.

IN many minds there is considerable prejudice against doctrinal preaching. It is said that many of the doctrines are very obscure; that some of them, indeed, are incomprehensible; that there is too much difference of opinion about them for them to be profitable subjects of discussion; that the only result of such discussion is to confuse and bewilder the understanding, and to lead the attention away from the practical duties of life into a region of barren speculation. Besides, it is sometimes added, it does not make much difference what any one believes in regard to the doctrines of religion, provided only he keeps close to the duties laid down in God's word; and that, therefore, the kind of preaching that is to be preferred is that which clearly points out those duties and earnestly insists on their discharge.

Those, however, who hold these views have entirely failed to apprehend the connection that subsists between doctrines and duties. What are the doctrines of religion? They relate to such subjects as the nature and attributes of God; the relations in which he stands to men; the relations in which they stand to him; and man's past history, present condition, and eternal destiny. These are some of the subjects to which the doc-



trines relate. And now every true doctrine is only the assertion of a fact in regard to one or more of these subjects. It is a doctrine of religion that there is a "God, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth"; but that is also a fact. It is a doctrine of religion that man has fallen from the high estate in which he was created by sinning against God, and has become spiritually totally depraved; but that is also a fact. It is a doctrine of religion that "there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" except the name of the Lord Jesus Christ; but that is also a fact; and the same is true of all the doctrines. They are all facts; so that the doctrines of religion are nothing more, nothing less, than the facts of religion. Thus they lie at its foundation. They make it possible, since they furnish the basis on which it rests. What sort of a religion would that be that was not grounded in, and built upon, well ascertained facts? But, since the doctrines of religion are its facts, how is it possible intelligently to preach it except by making its doctrines known and their meaning understood?

But what is the relation that subsists between doctrines and duties? Plainly this: the doctrines make the duties. Why is it my duty to love God? To find an answer to that question, must I not go back to certain doctrines of religion; and do I not say it is my duty to love him because he is infinitely excellent and glorious in himself; because he is my Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer; because he has bestowed great blessings on me in the past, and offers to bestow on me still greater blessings in the future? And do not these doctrines thus make the duty of loving him; and if these doctrines were not facts, would there rest on my heart the slightest obligation to

fix its supreme affections on him? Why is it my duty to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? To answer that question, must I not again go back to certain doctrines of religion; and do I not say that it is my duty to believe on him because I am a lost and helpless sinner; because he is the only Saviour; because he commands me to believe on him; because he is worthy of all my confidence; because only by believing on him can I be brought into that spiritual condition in which I shall be able to render to him the worship and service of which he is infinitely worthy? And do not these doctrines thus make the duty of believing on him; and if these doctrines were not also facts, would there be any reason whatever why I should give him the supreme confidence of my soul?

Thus the doctrines of religion make its duties. There is not a single duty imposed upon us in God's word that is not created by one or more of the doctrines there inculcated. This being true, we can now see why doctrines are to be preached. They are to be preached that duties may be known. Since doctrines create duties, it is impossible in the nature of things that any one can know anything more about his duties—their nature; their number; their importance; their obligatory force—than he knows about the doctrines out of which they spring. Doctrines and duties, therefore, ought always to be preached in closest connection; the doctrines as giving rise to the duties; the duties as flowing out of the doctrines.

I make these remarks in introducing this discourse because I have observed that it is in this way that the apostle presents doctrines and duties in this epistle, and in all his other epistles. In the previous part of this epistle he establishes a number of doctrines; and amongst them the doctrine that God is infinitely merci-

ful and has bestowed infinite mercies on the human race through the Lord Jesus Christ; and now at the beginning of this twelfth chapter he beseeches those to whom he was writing by those mercies to perform the great duty to which they give rise: "present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

In considering the text, I shall follow the apostle's method. I shall point out the duty to which he summons us, and, then, the doctrines out of which it springs:

I. A careful analysis of his words will show that he here teaches that it is our duty to make a voluntary and entire consecration of ourselves and all we have to the Lord as an act of religious worship. He expressly says that we are to present our bodies to him. "Present your bodies a living sacrifice." That means, of course, that every power of the body is to be his. The eyes are to be his to survey his glory in his word and in his works. The ears are to be his to listen to his commands. The mouth is to be his to proclaim his name, and celebrate his praise. The hands are to be his to labor for the promotion of the interests of his kingdom. The feet are to be his to run in the way of his commandments. The whole body is to be his to serve him in every way that he shall require. Clearly so much as that is meant when he says, "present your bodies a living sacrifice."

But is that all that is meant? Can it be possible, that after eleven chapters of solid argument, the design of which in great part is to make known the extent of our obligations to God, he could draw no broader, nor grander conclusion, than that our bodies only are to be presented to him? Surely not. That under the word

“bodies” he necessarily includes our souls is evident from the fact that our bodies can be consecrated only by our souls ; and they can make the consecration only when they see it to be due to God, and are honestly willing to make it because it is due. But when they see that, it is impossible that they should not also consecrate themselves to him, for they will then see that that is due to him even more, if possible, than the consecration of the body is. It is further evident, that under the word bodies he necessarily includes our souls, from the fact that our bodies are controlled by our souls, and, therefore, can be of no service to God unless our souls are consecrated with them. Of what service would a ship be to us unless we had control of that which guides the ship? And so, of what service can our bodies be to God unless he has control of that which guides our bodies? The soul, then, as well as the body, is to be consecrated to him. All its faculties are to be devoted to his service. The understanding is to be his to know him. The will is to be his to choose him. The heart is to be his to love him. The conscience is to be his to represent his authority in the soul, and to enforce obedience to all his commandments. The whole soul is to be his to glorify him in every way he shall make possible.

But can we stop here? Does the apostle mean that we are to stop here, and conclude that only our bodies and souls are to be consecrated to God? Every writer must be understood to mean, not only what he directly asserts, but everything else that his language necessarily implies ; and this rule of interpretation is specially valid in application to the Scriptures, because they were written under the inspiration of the Spirit of God. But he distinctly foresaw every necessary inference from every statement there made ; and, therefore, every such neces-

sary inference is just as true as every explicit statement is. Does not the apostle, then, necessarily imply that more is to be consecrated than simply our bodies and souls? Does he not imply that all that is ours—our time, our possessions, our influence—is also to be consecrated to him, and as entirely as our bodies and souls? Nothing can be more evident. When we consecrate our bodies and souls to him, that is, when we consecrate ourselves to him, the very idea of the consecration is that we are thereafter to live for him. But how can we live for him except as our time is spent for him, and our possessions are employed in promoting the interests of his cause and our influence is exerted in behalf of his kingdom? The very idea of consecration, then, carries in it, not only our bodies and souls, but everything else that is in any sense ours.

So far as we have examined the text, then, it teaches that we and all that is ours are to be presented a living sacrifice unto the Lord. But we have not yet exhausted its meaning. It needs to be emphasized that all that is ours is to be actually devoted to the Lord. It will not do to present it in theory whilst we keep it in reality. It will not do to present it in profession whilst we keep it in fact. It will not do so to present it that a kind of joint proprietorship in it is established between ourselves and him by which we permit him to share with us in its use. It will not do so to present it to him that we shall graciously allow him to have for his purposes what we think we do not need for our own purposes. That is not the consecration here inculcated. We are to present it a sacrifice. We are to lay it all on his altar to be consumed in his service. This is a very different view of the great duty from that generally entertained by Christians. The prevalent view amongst them seems to be that they are

first to set apart for their own use so much as they think they need for that purpose, and then give to God the remainder. Unfortunately, their selfish conceptions of their own wants are usually so great that there is no remainder, or it is very small ; and that is the reason why the treasures of the churches are almost always empty, and why the great causes in which the church is engaged have to go around amongst the churches, and at almost every door beg and beg, like poor mendicants, to get enough to keep them from perishing ; and even then generally get only the trimmings and parings of liberal incomes. It is no such consecration as that the apostle here enjoins. The consecration he insists on is first to present to the Lord all that is ours, and then receive back from him for our own purposes so much as we see in his word he permits us thus to employ. And if that were the consecration characterizing his people, his treasures would overflow, and his work would be prosecuted with something like that vigor of which it is worthy.

But there is still more in the text on this important subject. Not only must all that is ours be presented to the Lord a sacrifice, but it must be presented a living sacrifice. Under the old dispensation the time necessary for a sacrifice was very brief ; perhaps an hour was abundantly sufficient for the purpose ; and the sacrifice was consummated by the death of the victim. But it is to no such sacrifice as that that we are here summoned. The time necessary for our sacrifice is the whole time from this moment forward to the end of our earthly history ; and the sacrifice is to be consummated, not by our being slain for the Lord, but by our living for him ; and, therefore, it is called a living sacrifice, a sacrifice that is to be repeated, continued, protracted to the last moment of our earthly existence.

And not only must it be a living sacrifice, but it must be a holy sacrifice. Under the old dispensation it was necessary that the sacrifice offered should be without essential physical defect. The lamb must be without spot or blemish. It is necessary that this sacrifice to which we are here summoned shall be without essential, spiritual defect. That is, it is necessary that the motives prompting us to make it shall, at least prevalently, be such as are acceptable to God. It will not do to make this sacrifice simply because it is expedient, or because it is seemly, or because it secures the applause of men, or some other merely secular end, or because only by making it we can escape the righteous retributions of eternity. These may come in as subordinate motives prompting us to make it; but if we would so make it that it shall be "holy" in his sight we must make it because he requires it, and because we love him, and because we wish to do his will, and to glorify his great and holy name.

But the apostle has more yet to say on this important theme. Not only must we present all that is ours a living and a holy sacrifice unto the Lord, but we must do it voluntarily and cheerfully. He does not ask us to do it simply as a duty, or under the constraints of conscience, or that we may escape the divine displeasure; but he beseeches us to do it by the mercies of God—the infinitely great and precious mercies that he had just been pointing out, and we are to make it gladly and gratefully in response to those mercies. And, then, once more, it is to be of the nature of religious worship. Such was the nature of all the sacrifices under the old dispensation; and much more, if possible, must it be the nature of the more purely spiritual sacrifice here enjoined.

Such is the apostle's teaching as to this great duty ; and if we now sum up all that has been educed from the text, I think we shall find that the statement made at the beginning is true, that he teaches that it is our duty to make a voluntary and entire consecration of ourselves and all that is ours to God as an act of religious worship.

II. And now let us consider some of the doctrines that give rise to this duty ; or, what is the same thing, let us consider some of the reasons by which it is enforced. " I beseech you," says the apostle, " by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice." I suppose he appeals both to the mercies that are in God and to the mercies that are from him. I may say, then, in the first place, that he here appeals to the mercies that are in God ; or, in other words, to the fact that God is a merciful being, to induce us to consecrate ourselves to him ; and there is good reason for this form of appeal. Men are by nature afraid to consecrate themselves to him. They are afraid their enjoyments will be abridged, their happiness diminished, their liberty infringed upon, and their secular prosperity interfered with. They are afraid that they will lose something desirable and valuable that they might else enjoy in this world. So far as the future is concerned they are convinced that it would be better to be the Lord's ; but so far as this life is concerned they can hardly help believing that much more that is desirable and enjoyable may be secured by standing somewhat aloof from God and his service, than by entire consecration to it, and, therefore, they refuse to perform this duty. Now the apostle would remove that erroneous impression by assuring them that God is a merciful, an infinitely merciful being ; and that, therefore, he cannot mean by the consecration here asked to do them harm ;

but must mean to do them good. He cannot mean to make their condition worse; but must mean to make it better; must mean to bestow on them richer enjoyments, and a higher happiness, and a truer liberty, and better qualifications for the discharge of all the secular duties of life. Certainly his people have always so found it. There never has been a man who truly consecrated himself to God who did not find it a change for the better in every important respect, and that all his highest interests for time and for eternity were promoted by it. He has found his "ways ways of pleasantness, and his paths paths of peace"; his yoke easy and his burden light. He has found him "a very present help in time of trouble"; "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother;" a guide in perplexity; a comforter in sorrow; a defender in danger; and that the longer he continued in his service the richer became its rewards; and those who have finished their course in his service have found that he went with them down into the dark valley of the shadow of death, and that he permitted them even there to fear no evil; and that on the farther side he took them up and presented them faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding great joy. Such has been the experience of all those who consecrated themselves to him and spent their lives in his service. Here, then, is the apostle's appeal: "I beseech you by the mercies of God"—these mercies that he has bestowed on all his people in the past—I beseech you by these mercies to consecrate yourselves to him, that he may bestow these mercies on you. Ought not such an appeal to prevail with us? Unconverted friends, why should you hesitate to respond to it? What is the character of the master whom you are now serving? How does he treat his servants? Perhaps you may find an illustration

of his character and of the manner in which he treats his servants in a fable that you may remember to have read. A tyrant once called one of his subjects into his presence and asked him what was his employment. He answered that he was a blacksmith. "Go," said he, "and make me a chain of such a length." He went and did as he was commanded, expecting to be suitably rewarded when he presented the chain completed in his master's presence. But his master only bade him go and make it twice as long; and this he did again and again, until the poor man's life had been worn out by his unrequited toil. Finally he presented himself in his master's presence for the last time, hoping that then at least he would have compassion on him and minister to his long neglected wants. But, to his amazement, he only bade his servants come and take the chain he had made and bind him hand and foot and cast him into a furnace of fire! Such is the character of the master you now serve. You are engaged in the service of sin. You have not yet received any very satisfactory reward; but you are expecting it here often; and so you continue in that service. Alas! you know not that all this promise of reward is mere delusion. You know not that you, too, are engaged in making a chain that is at last to fetter your own limbs. Every day you are making it longer. Every sinful thought; every sinful feeling; every sinful word; every sinful act adds an additional link to it; and soon it will be sufficiently long to enwrap your whole being in the folds of an endless bondage, and then will come the dreadful command, "bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the furnace of fire." It is absolutely certain that this is to be the result of your service of sin; "for the wages of sin is death." Why, then, should you hesitate to give up the service of such a master as that,

and engage in the service of such a master as this, who never practises cruelties on his servants, and who never keeps back any promised rewards ; but who multiplies unto them grace and mercy and peace in this life, and in the life to come bestows on them glory and honor and immortality ?

But the apostle appeals not only to the mercies that are in God. He appeals also to the mercies that are from God. He appeals to the mercies that are from God in providence to induce us to consecrate ourselves to his service. No thoughtful person can deny that he is kept in being every moment by the providential mercies of God. I know that many have the notion that they are their own preservers in life ; that they provide for themselves that on which they subsist, and so do not realize their dependence on God. But the groundlessness of the notion is easily revealed. Whose is the air we are now breathing, and who pours it around the world in such abundance and keeps it so fresh and pure ? Whose is the light that every day shines down upon us from above, shedding around us its genial warmth and illuminating our pathway ? Whose are the clouds that traverse the heavens, bringing us the early and latter rains and fruitful seasons, so that there is enough for man and for beast ? Whose are the springs that rise among the hills and flow among valleys, quenching the thirst of every living thing ? How does it come to pass that these natural agencies are constantly ministering to our ever-recurring wants ? Are they the provisions of man's skill ? He has no more to do with their existence and activities than he has to do with the remotest star that shines in the depths of space. God is their author, and all their movements are regulated by his will. But, now, without their ministrations we could not continue in existence for an

hour. Let him take away the air we are now breathing; let him extinguish the lights that shine in the heavens; let him stop the kind ministrations of the clouds; let him bid the springs hide themselves in the caverns of the earth, and what then would become of man's vain notion that he is his own supporter in life? As quickly as he sprang up out of the dust would he return to it and be no more. Thus we are kept in being every moment by the mercies of God. But do these mercies deserve no recognition at our hands? Do they call for no love and for no service? Can anything be plainer than this: that if we are kept in being every moment by the mercies of God that being ought to be consecrated to him? This is the appeal the apostle here makes from the providential mercies of God. Ought we not to respond to it also? I confess I know not how to characterize the conduct of the man who sees that he is thus kept in being by the mercies of God, and yet deliberately goes on in sin against him. It may be illustrated by an historical incident. It is said that in the battle of Alma, in 1854, a wounded Russian soldier fell into the hands of the English and was piteously crying for water. An English captain stepped aside from the ranks of a passing regiment and ministered to his wants, and then hastened on to join his command. The wounded man was much refreshed, and struggling up in the use of the strength that captain's kindness had ministered to him, picked up his gun, deliberately took aim, and shot him as he passed away in the distance. Now we are amazed; we are indignant at such ingratitude as that. But what does the poor sinner do who is kept in being every hour by the mercies of God? He does not, indeed, in the use of the strength that God every hour confers upon him, inflict on him a mortal wound; for he is beyond his reach, and, besides,

is invulnerable to his assaults. But he does inflict on him the only wrong in his power. The very breath he gives him he breathes out before him, perhaps, in words offensive to his purity and insulting to his majesty. The very powers of body and mind he bestows on him he employs in violating his law, and the very being he preserves for him he moves up and down on the earth right before his face in the constant attitude of rebellion against his authority! Dear unconverted friends, abhor such ingratitude as that, and since you are kept in being every hour by the mercies of God, do what is here insisted on: consecrate that being to him.

But as the apostle appeals to the mercies that are from God in providence, so he appeals to the mercies that are from him in redemption. In this epistle he proves that all have sinned; that all have gone astray; that all are exposed to the penalty of the law; that all are so undeserving and so ill-deserving that they are justly exposed to the doom threatened against the finally impenitent; but that, nevertheless, God has given for their redemption the very most and the very best even he could give: the blood and life of his own Son; and it is specially in view of this mercy—so wonderful; so immeasurable—that he entreats us to devote ourselves to his service; and if we appreciate his appeal as we should, we will gladly say:

“ Lord, I am thine, entirely thine,
Purchased and saved by blood divine;
With full consent thine I would be,
And own thy sovereign right in me.

“ Thine would I live; thine would I die;
Be thine through all eternity.”

The last appeal the apostle makes to secure this conse-

cration is that it is our reasonable service. And who can say anything against it? Who can present anything that will have even the appearance of a reason why we ought not to do what is here enjoined? Shall we not, then, do it? Shall we follow reason everywhere except where it is most important to follow it? If so, let us not be surprised if the disastrous consequences shall hereafter be in proportion to the magnitude of our folly.

I make one remark in conclusion. If Christians would perform the duty here enjoined, many of them would be much happier than they now are. They are in doubt as to the relation in which they stand to the Saviour. They walk in darkness; and most probably the reason is that they are not performing this duty as they ought. They are not wholly consecrating themselves to God. If we keep back anything from him, he will keep back something from us. If we keep back this consecration from him, he will keep back the evidence that we are his. But if we give ourselves to him, he will give himself to us. If we give ourselves wholly to him, he will give himself wholly to us; and he will so dwell in us that we shall have the consciousness that we are his, and so have the "peace that passeth all understanding," and the "joy that is unspeakable and full of glory."