



SAFE HARBOR

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William E. Lang Jr., Director

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The Gift

It is very common to refer to Jesus as God's gift to all of humankind given to redeem and restore us to a relationship with God. Here is the true definition of grace. More so by this grace we become enfolded in a far reaching life of grace which has a requirement of our willful act of responding to God's gift with a gift of our own. This response is not tied to ritual or ceremony but rather to a conscious action on the part of the believer. Granted the response is only able to occur when we open our lives to the Risen Christ but it is a necessity for the Christian believer.

Therefore I exhort you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice—alive, holy, and pleasing to God—which is your reasonable service. Do not be conformed to this present world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may test and approve what is the will of God—what is good and well-pleasing and perfect. (Ro.12:1-2)

In these verses lies the truth of God's requirement for holiness which leads to a successful Christian life.

Jesus said he did not come to do away with the Law, he reinforced the expectation of God that His children followed the moral law which is summed up in the Great Commandment, Jesus answered, "The most important is: '***Listen, Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.***' The second is: '***Love your neighbor as yourself.***' There is no other commandment greater than these. (Mark 12:28-31)

Be this as it may, it is not enough to merely take the title of "Christian" and ignore a large portion of the responsibility that accompanies it. The question is "How can I fulfill the law of love that Christ stated so very plainly?"

The responses are varied and often buried in half-truths taken from Scripture. Teachings that promote only a sacramental hope of salvation and which allow room for repentance and contrition encompass many within the churches. Another response is that one cannot lose their salvation no matter how they live their lives and whatever holiness they present is only superficial. Another is the strict legalism that emphasizes not love but a rigid discipline and rigid beliefs. Another widespread half-truth is that God will not allow anyone suffer punishment for their sins. Consider these words of Jesus.

“When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. ⁴⁴ Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. ⁴⁵ Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation”.

It is clear that the person destined for holiness cannot allow the temple of the body to be filled by substitute religiousness. God has made a provision for this filling to come from him to each who would open the temple of their body to the gift of God. As Jesus said, ***“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵ All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”*** (Jn 16:12-15). This is not an optional gift for the believer but really is the greatest privilege that living faith can provide. It is essential and brings fully the presence of God’s holiness through the Holy Spirit that is our gift from Jesus so that His work might continue.

In order for the Holy Spirit to accomplish the works of holiness it requires a gift from the followers of Jesus. As Paul writes, we are to continually present our bodies as a sacrifice, living, holy and pleasing to God. This is the work of ultimate love that we must give to God. Jesus said that the greatest love is to lay down one’s life for another. If we cannot give up our lives to God than how would it be possible to love another?

Our gift to God is then the relinquishing of our desires, hopes and wishes so that our lives become in tune with the desires of God. It is not evil to desire money, fortune, fame and other worldly pleasures but they do not fill, leaving space for evil to enter in.

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God with your body. (1Cor. 6:19-20)

Our body is a temple. It will either bring praise and glory to God through the ministrations of the Holy Spirit or it will be a place like that which was outside of Eden. Our gift to God is the temple of our body is to be kept clean and holy, the place for proper sacrifice.

The Theology of Hymns

During the Reformation Martin Luther had a great concern about teaching the people theology since most had been within the Roman Catholic Church and were not theologians at heart but rather common people. He saw that the stability of the new movement needed to be bolstered and spread among the people. The solution was the inclusion of hymns within the services that were in the common language as well as theologically correct.

In keeping with this, we will look at some of the hymns that are often taken for granted but would serve to enhance our faith.

Sweet Will of God

My stubborn will at last hath yielded;
I would be Thine, and Thine alone;
And this the prayer my lips are bringing,
Lord, let in me Thy will be done.

Refrain:

Sweet will of God, still fold me closer,
Till I am wholly lost in Thee.

I'm tired of sin, footsore and weary,
The darksome path hath dreary grown;
But now a light has ris'n to cheer me;
I find in Thee my Star, my Sun.

Thy precious will, O conqu'ring Savior,
Doth now embrace and compass me;
All discords hushed, my peace a river,
My soul, a prisoned bird set free.

Shut in with Thee, O Lord, forever,
My wayward feet no more to roam;
What pow'r from Thee my soul can sever?
The center of God's will my home.

This is precious old song written by Leila Norris. It is not often heard in churches today but it is one that should be a prayer from our lips each morning. It is a hymn of sacrifice and receptiveness to God's plan for our day.

If we make this the song of our heart and truly desire the life of holiness then we will have presented our bodies that living sacrifice.

Words of Promise

⁵ And the one seated on the throne said: “Look! I am making all things new!” Then he said to me, “Write it down, because these words are reliable and true.” ⁶ He also said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the one who is thirsty I will give water free of charge from the spring of the water of life. ⁷ The one who conquers will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be my son. ⁸ But as for the cowards, unbelievers, detestable persons, murderers, the sexually immoral, and those who practice magic spells, idol worshipers, and all those who lie, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur. That is the second death.”

Revelation 21:1-8 Hope for the Believer and the surety of judgment.