



Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God.

(Romans 12:1)

We seldom consider the value of PEACE until we are without it, but peace is one of the loftiest gifts of grace in God's treasure trove. Few attain to that perfect peace made available in Christ even though it is available to all of the elect of God who claim His sacrifice and salvation.

There is a story of a great New England philanthropist and patron of the arts who desired to reward, with a handsome grant of money, an aspiring artist who could best depict perfect peace in a painting. Many entries were presented and finally narrowed down to two entrants. The first revealed a beautiful pastoral scene of gentle rolling countryside with sheep grazing on fertile pastures, and birds singing sweetly from the trees. There was a wonderful sunrise in the background that added many hues of color to the sky. It was a truly fine work of art.

The second painting was of a great and tumultuous waterfall cascading from a rocky cleft of a mountain. The water fell hundreds of feet into a misty pool at the bottom. It was anything but a peaceful scene; yet, behind the waterfall, a cherry branch had sprouted, and grown there, affording a bluebird an ideal place to build her nest in the midst of the uproar and terror of the water fall just a few feet away. No creature would have ventured there into that calamitous place to harm the nest. The mother bluebird was peacefully sitting on her nest. Though the first painting had much merit, it was the second that won the prize for depicting perfect peace because peace is not dependant on the external environment, but the internal condition of the heart. This is the peace that Christ gives. It is the kind of peace that the great martyrs, Huss, Cranmer, Ridley, Latimer, and hundreds of others embraced on their dying crosses. It is the peace described in Philippians 4:7 - "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." As the text declares, this is the kind of peace that keeps our hearts and minds stayed on Christ!

Today's hymn is an old evangelical favorite entitled, "Is Your All on the Altar."

Both music and lyrics were created by the great hymn composer, Elisha A. Hoffman of Philadelphia in 1905. Hoffman is almost as highly celebrated as Fanny Crosby among hymn writers. He also wrote the lyrics and tune for two thousand other hymns including "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms" though the refrain was written by AJ Showalter of Dalton, Georgia.

Is Your All on the Altar

You have longed for sweet peace,
And for faith to increase,
And have earnestly, fervently prayed;
But you cannot have rest,
Or be perfectly blest,
Until all on the altar is laid.

Refrain

Is your all on the altar of sacrifice laid?
Your heart does the Spirit control?
You can only be blest,
And have peace and sweet rest,
As you yield Him your body and soul.

Would you walk with the Lord,
In the light of His Word,
And have peace and contentment always?
You must do His sweet will,
To be free from all ill,
On the altar your all you must lay.

Refrain

O we never can know
What the Lord will bestow
Of the blessings for which we have prayed,
Till our body and soul
He doth fully control,
And our all on the altar is laid.

Refrain

Who can tell all the love
He will send from above,
And how happy our hearts will be made,
Of the fellowship sweet
We shall share at His feet,
When our all on the altar is laid.

Refrain

"*You have longed for sweet peace, And for faith to increase, And have earnestly, fervently prayed; But you cannot have rest, Or be perfectly blest, Until all on the altar is laid.*" It is possible to experience a false peace that is derived from false religion or even from the spirits of a bottle; but that peace will not hold you in times of danger and trouble - only the peace of God can do that. It is natural for the soul to long for peace that is not simply the absence of turmoil, but which imparts a sweet savor. With the growth and increase of faith comes, as an added bonus, greater measures of PEACE. Perhaps you have prayed and longed for that peace, but find its benefits have eluded you. Why have we failed to achieve that perfect peace when we have fervently prayed for the same? It

is perhaps because we have held back that wedge of gold, or tenaciously clung to that single besetting sin that we simply do not desire to relinquish. We have not placed our ALL on the altar. Though we can truly offer nothing to God since He owns everything, including our souls; we can, by faith return to Him that which is rightfully HIS - our ALL! When we come to Him without reservation, we will find peace.

"Would you walk with the Lord, In the light of His Word, And have peace and contentment alway? You must do His sweet will, To be free from all ill, On the altar your all you must lay." When we walk with the Lord, we are not headed in the way of our former desires, but according to His direction and way. We know the Way because we have been given the Light of His Word to guide us thereon. Perfect Peace and Freedom is not doing what the old corrupt spirit of man desires, but obeying and doing what the Lord has shown to be His will through the Scriptures. It is by this means that we can always have that peace and comfort - not holding anything back from the Altar.

"O we never can know What the Lord will bestow Of the blessings for which we have prayed, Till our body and soul He doth fully control, And our all on the altar is laid." If our souls desire something that is outside the will of the Lord to grant, we shall not receive it regardless our fervent prayers. There is a single exception in which the Lord may grant an inconvenient request so that we may learn, after overly persistent prayer, that to have our prayer answered will not profit, but harm, us. Overly persistent prayer is a one-way prayer in which we persist to ask when God has already said, NO. It is a prayer that speaks but does not listen. When our sinful wills (free wills belonging to Satan) have been surrendered for His perfect will, then our prayers will be measured by what is righteous and lawful for us to have. Even our desires are conformed to His for us.

"Who can tell all the love He will send from above, And how happy our hearts will be made, Of the fellowship sweet We shall share at His feet, When our all on the altar is laid." Love does make joyful. The currency of God's Kingdom is LOVE. All love comes down from Him. *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.* (James 1:17) The tears our dear sister, Mary of Bethany, shed at the feet of Jesus were also tears of great joy - joy that Jesus had honored her household with His Presence. If we shed tears of sorrow, Christ will, in due course, turn them to those same tears of joy that Mary Magdalene shed upon seeing the risen Christ at the Garden Tomb. But we must surrender those material and spiritual possessions that eclipse our vision and view of Christ in order to have that perfect peace of which this hymn makes reference.

Refrain

"Is your all on the altar of sacrifice laid? Your heart does the Spirit control? You can only be blest, And have peace and sweet rest, As you yield Him your body and soul." This hymn concludes with two mutually dependent questions. First, have we turned over our all and all to Christ? And, secondly, have we substituted HIS all-in-all for our own; in other words, have we surrendered our works, our bodies, and our desires to Him in total? Then have we laid claim to His Will and Spirit to be our own in all future endeavors? Our bodies are presently an essential abode for our souls; but the day will come when we must disrobe from this carnal body, and all that we shall possess in the interim is our souls. It is that soul which will determine at which place it shall be, at the resurrection, reunited with a body - either Heaven or Hell. It is my hope and prayer that you have not measured that which you have placed on the altar of God - it is just enough if you have placed all that you have, all that you are, and all that you shall become, there. *And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.* (1 Cor 15:28)