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## **THE CONSECRATING BELIEVER AND THE SANCTIFYING GOD**

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## **THE CONSECRATING BELIEVER AND THE SANCTIFYING GOD**

"Consecrate yourselves today to the Lord ... and the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly." (Exodus 32:29. 1 Thess. 5:23, 24 R.V.)

We have linked together these two Scripture portions for three distinct reasons:

A. Because their subjects are so closely related. They naturally stand together as distinct halves, yet making one complete whole.

B. Because their subjects so widely differ. One is purely human, while the other is entirely divine. One God demands of me; the other He does for me.

C. Because these two are so frequently mistaken the one for the other. Men so sadly mix things, but the Word of God is always clear.

In their respective spheres, Consecration and Entire Sanctification are as diverse as the Poles, yet, in a well-rounded spiritual experience they are as inseparably wedded as the sun and the sunlight; one is the antecedent of the other.

Every true Christian desires to be holy. Whatever may be his doctrinal position, he heartily yearns to be like his Lord. It is here, however, that the real difficulty commences, and that because of the muddled ideas which are so prevalent concerning the subject.

In the minds of some there is a peculiar vagueness. They are ever aspiring after a richer experience about which they sing and for which they pray, yet it never seems to occur to them that it should definitely become their own. It is a beautiful but unrealizable ideal.

With others, there is a strange indefiniteness. They know what they want and they seek it. They are ever at the altar in the attitude of consecration, but they never take the faith attitude and definitely claim.

With another class there is a distinct reservation. They are constantly claiming, but never having completed the consecration nothing happens when they pray. They cry to heaven for the sanctifying flame, but the altar not being completely furnished, the fire never falls.

All this is for lack of a clear conception as to the way in. Yet, amid the many confusing voices of today it is not to be wondered at that some are perplexed. There is one place, however, where the way is made perfectly clear, and that place is the Word of God itself. To this, we shall turn, noting two outstanding facts:

I. -- The Primary Condition of a Holy Life is a Distinct and Definite Human Act Which the Bible Calls Consecration.

The question is sometimes asked, "Is Consecration a preliminary of the holy life or is it a product?" In other words, does a person consecrate in order to obtain the Blessing of Entire Sanctification, or does the Consecrated life result from the Blessing itself? Unhesitatingly we answer, Both these views are true, for they are two aspects of one great spiritual truth. Without doubt the soul's consecration is a lifelong fact and is capable of unlimited unfolding, but it is also an initial act of soul-abandonment by which the holy life is entered. It is a momentary act of faith, worked out in its implications and details through a lifetime of faithfulness.

If we are clearly to understand this act of consecration, two things must be recognized concerning it:

1. It is a sacred transaction between God's own people and Himself.

(1) It is not the work of the sinner.

The sinner cannot consecrate. He is dead in trespasses and sins. (Eph. 2:1.) When awakened to his lost condition he must renounce his sins, repent, and cry to God for mercy. In the

eyes of God he is a lawbreaker and a rebel, and as such he has no right of access into the Divine Presence, therefore any offering he might desire to make would be an insult to the holiness of God and an affront to the majesty of His Throne.

The context of this Consecration passage is illuminating in this respect. Moses had been away in the Mount in communion with God, and while he thus enjoyed the holy Presence, Israel had lapsed into idolatry. Descending from the mountain, Moses had entered the camp, destroyed the idolatrous calf in the midst, and had then issued this stern challenge: "Who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me." In response to this call, the sons of Levi gathered around him, and after a terrible punishment had been meted out to the rebels, he addressed these separated Levites, saying: "Consecrate yourselves today to the Lord."

In these words of Moses, and especially in the light of their setting, two things now become clear:

A. The call to consecration is not addressed to the Camp, but those loyal souls who have separated themselves from it.

B. The fact of consecration concerns not their sins but themselves. Compare here Paul's great exhortation to consecration in Rom. 12:1, 2. The body is to be presented as a "living sacrifice," and this is declared to be our "reasonable service."

If you are not yet spiritually re-born, consecration does not yet concern you, for none can acceptably consecrate but the Spirit-born child of God.

(2) Nor is it the act of the backslider. Many are vainly trying to consecrate who need rather to confess their spiritual leakage and seek afresh the favor of God.

Habits manifestly not to the Divine glory and all doubtful things, call not for consecration but for confession and renunciation. Their place is not the altar but the rubbish heap. They must be "put away."

(3) Consecration, then, concerns one class of people and one class alone, namely, those who are consciously God's, and are walking in all present light. None else need try to fill the altar, for they will only meet with disappointment and end in despair.

2. This consecration is a definite transaction which should not need either repetition or duplication.

To be valid it must have two outstanding characteristics:

(1) It must be entire -- covering everything.

(2) It must be irrevocable -- embracing all time.

Some concrete illustrations might help us in our endeavor to grasp this truth. We take three suggested by Dr. Hills. There is the example of Ittai. King David was feeling the sting of national rejection. His cause was distinctly unpopular, for Absalom, the usurper, had stolen the people's hearts. In his loneliness and grief David was now hurrying away into exile accompanied only by a little band of loyal souls, among whom was Ittai, a foreigner and a comparative stranger. Him, David hesitated to allow to share the hardships of his exile, and pleaded with him to return to the place of comfort, only to receive in reply such words as have immortalized him for every succeeding age: "And Ittai answered the king, and said, As the Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in life or death, even there also will thy servant be." (2 Sam. 15:21.) That is the spirit of consecration.

It is a far stretch from the land of Palestine and King David to the Highlands of Scotland, but here again we meet the same principle. Prince Charles was sorely pressed and seeking recruits for his difficult cause. While vainly trying to persuade two Highland gentlemen to join him, he noticed not far away a young man with gleaming eye, his hand on the hilt of his sword, and seemingly waiting for a chance to speak. "Will you help me?" asked the Prince; to which Ronald MacDonald replied, "Why, sir, though no other man in these Highlands should draw a sword, I am willing to die for you." That is the spirit of consecration.

Hear a consecrated soul give his testimony: "Kneeling alone in my mother's room in Baltimore I made a consecration that covered everything. To die at once if needs be, though a young man; to live and recover; to do, to be, to suffer; anything for Jesus. This was my consecration; all doubtful things were swept aside and a large margin left on God's side." That is consecration indeed.

There is, however, a spurious thing which so often passes under this sacred name. It is a cheap imitation; an unholy masquerade. The Jews of Christ's day had a word which aptly illustrates it, the word "Corban." We meet it in Mark 7:8-13, where the Master is lashing the Pharisees for their hypocrisy in the misuse of the Temple laws so that they might dodge their plain responsibility. Whatever they kept in their own name was, of course, their own property, and for its use they alone were responsible, but whatever was deeded to the Sanctuary might be held for their own use during their lifetime, but at their decease it went into the treasury. Hence, if a needy relative should seek assistance, even parents who might be in need, the man would solemnly and piously exclaim: "O no, I could not give you anything; it is Corban, dedicated, it belongs to God." Yet these men saw no inconsistency in using this dedicated wealth throughout their lifetime as though it were wholly their own.

There are Christians like that. How they love that old hymn:

"Here I give my all to Thee,  
Friends, and time, and earthly store;  
Soul and body Thine to be;  
Wholly Thine for evermore."

In the meeting they sing it, at the altar they repeat it, and in their testimonies they weep as they talk about it. It is now clearly on record that all they have belongs to God; but how does it

work out in practical experience? Soon, that daughter who was put on the altar comes home and tells the burden of her heart. The heathen are dying without the Gospel and without hope. She has heard the call and has offered herself for the foreign field. "But Mary," says mother, "do you realize what you are doing? Don't you know that to part with you would break my heart? Are there not plenty of heathen at home? And after all, if this thing is so much on your heart, why not support somebody else on the foreign field? (Let some other mother make the sacrifice of her daughter.) Surely you will not insist on going so long as I live; you love me too well to grieve me, don't you?"

What is this? Sentimentalism pure and simple. Sickly, weak, anemic, pale-blooded stuff which can cry over the heathen in a missionary meeting, cry over consecration in a holiness meeting, and then cry in self-pity over the thought of a personal sacrifice which God has done you the honor of asking you to make. This thing works itself out in a thousand different ways, and its issues and implications are tremendous. A consecrated life is a magnificent thing. It has no shorelines, no weights and no bands. Whatever it holds, it holds loosely and for the Divine glory alone. It calls nothing its own, but lives on the altar. Its very being is a living sacrifice, proving what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.

II. -- When This Primary Work Has Been Completed, God Does What We Cannot Do; He Sanctifies Wholly.

In other words, as soon as the altar is faithfully filled, heaven opens and the fire falls.

Concerning this Sanctifying work three things are to be noted:

1. It is as complete as the consecration made.

God is at least as thorough in His work as He would have me to be in mine. When I consecrate fully He sanctifies wholly, and that sanctification extends to every part of the being, "Your whole spirit, and soul, and body." It is so thorough, radical and deep that wherever sin may have its location God's sanctifying work goes to the root. "That the body (totality) of sin might be destroyed." (Rom. 6:6)

2. It is as emphatic as the tense used. It is no new thought we express when we say that the Greek has a tense with which our English language has nothing to compare, namely, the aorist. It indicates a crisis instantaneously wrought with results which abide.

The faith which we embrace inspires the expectation of three great crises, each of which are instantaneous. There is the act of Justification, that initial work which has as its accompaniment the Spirit's regenerating power by which the sinner becomes a child of God. At the other end, there is the fact of Glorification, that change to be Divinely wrought when Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom, shall come into the air to raise the godly dead and catch up to Himself the living saints who look for His appearing. (1 Cor. 15:52.) Between these two terminal facts stands the work of Entire Sanctification, that sin-destroying operation wrought within the soul enjoying Justification and anticipating Glorification. In all three instances the method is the same; it is momentary and instantaneous, wrought like the lightning flash, and the tense in each case is aorist.

### 3. It is enduring as the Christian Hope.

"But," says the objector, "as a rule flashes don't last; and may not that be the reason for many of the unsatisfactory spiritual experiences today?" We answer, "It depends entirely as to the source from which the flash comes. Holy Ghost flashes are never mere flares. All God's lightning strokes are effective, and He Who does the work guarantees to keep it done; the soul's only concern being to abide and obey. In so far as the soul is faithful the Blessing lasts. It will last when circumstances alter and when things go wrong; when loved ones fail you and when Christians disappoint you; when you are slandered, misrepresented and misjudged; when the way is dark, when Satan rages and hell is let loose. It will last "unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

When Thomas Collins came to the end of that long and useful life, his sister, entering his bedchamber, began to speak to him about the glorious witness he had borne to the experience of Full Salvation. The very words roused the old warrior, and, summoning all his little remaining strength, he exclaimed: "Yes! I got it; I kept it; I have it now; and it is heaven." With this testimony on his lips he went Home.

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THE END