

CHAPTER THREE CONSECRATION

Scripture Reading: Rom. 6:19; 12:1; 1 Cor. 6:19-20; 2 Cor. 5:14-15

Following regeneration a believer needs to have a clearance of the past, and he needs to consecrate himself. The New Testament clearly teaches and deals with our need to consecrate ourselves to the Lord after we are saved. In a local church we must spend a certain amount of time to help the brothers and sisters one by one experience consecration and realize it in a full way. In some places we have spent one or two years, week after week and message after message, stressing that all the believers, the saved ones, need to consecrate themselves, not merely in a doctrinal way but in a very practical way. Some brothers and sisters have even been willing to open themselves and give a testimony of their consecration so that their experience can be checked by others in the church.

In his teachings in the New Testament, the apostle Paul always stresses consecration. In Romans, for example, consecration is mentioned in chapter six and again in chapter twelve. Romans 6 deals with our release from sin by realizing that we have been crucified with Christ. If we read this chapter carefully, however, we will see that the chief point is not only realizing our crucifixion with Christ but that we must offer ourselves, not only consecrating ourselves as a whole but offering our members. Verse 19 says, "I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to uncleanness and lawlessness unto lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness unto sanctification." To present our members is to present them one by one. If we realize that we have been crucified with Christ and that we are released from sin, we must cooperate with the work the Lord has done by offering our members to Him. Then in chapter twelve, before the apostle begins to say something about the Body life, he advises and exhorts us to present our bodies in a definite way (v. 1).

CONSECRATION BEING THE BASIS FOR EVERY SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE AFTER REGENERATION

From our own experience we can testify that without consecration it is impossible to experience the crucifixion of Christ and even more impossible to realize the Body life. Consecration is the basis for every kind of experience after regeneration. For regeneration alone, there is no need for consecration, but if we do not consecrate ourselves after regeneration, we will be frustrated. We will be outside the gate, having no entrance into further experiences. All spiritual experiences after regeneration depend on the step of consecration.

Many spiritual writings in the past, such as those by Andrew Murray on prayer, the inner life, and abiding in Christ, point out the need for consecration. In many of his writings, Murray points out that in order to experience what he is talking about in that book, we need to take the step of consecration and pass through this crisis. In order to have a prayer life, we must pass through the crisis of consecration. In order to have faith, we must pass through consecration. And in order to abide in Christ, we must offer ourselves to Christ.

In her book entitled *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*, Hannah W. Smith also stresses consecration. With the central message of consecration, Mrs. Smith and her husband, among others, began what became the Keswick Convention in England in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Keswick Convention had the sole purpose of helping Christians to realize that they had to pass this crisis, and according to history, the blessing brought in through Keswick was due primarily to consecration. In the early publications of Keswick, the messages spoke much of consecration. It seems that those writers, such as Evan Hopkins, knew nothing but consecration. There is no doubt that at that time, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, consecration was the main item of the Lord's recovery. About that same time, the work of the foreign missions began. This was something of the Lord, because for service in the mission field there is the real need of consecration. According to church history,

more people consecrated themselves to the Lord at that time than ever before, most of them helped by the messages of the Keswick Convention.

ENTERING BY THE GATE OF CONSECRATION AND WALKING ON THE WAY OF CONSECRATION

It is entirely right that for any kind of experience we need to consecrate ourselves. Consecration is like the entrance to a building; if we do not pass through the entrance, it is impossible to go anywhere in the building. In order to share in any part of a building, we must pass through the gate. Immediately in front of the first entrance to the tabernacle was the altar. There were many things to experience in the tabernacle. Outside was the laver, and inside were the table of the bread of the Presence, the lampstand, the incense altar, and the ark with its items, but in order to share in those things one had to pass the altar and deal with it. There was no possibility of touching anything within the tabernacle without passing through the altar. With the altar there is the aspect of redemption, but there is also the aspect of consecration. Everything placed on the altar was an offering; this signifies consecration.

The tabernacle is a type both of Christ and of the church. In order to experience the riches of Christ typified by the things in the tabernacle, we need to pass through the crisis of consecration. In addition, in order to experience the church life as God's building and dwelling place, we must pass the altar, that is, the crisis of consecration. In order to have the real Christian life and the real church life, we all must learn day by day to live a life of consecration.

The life of consecration begins with a crisis. Then after the crisis we have the way. The Scriptures speak differently from our common understanding. We often say that we take the way and go through the gate. According to the Scriptures, however, we first go through the gate, and then we have the way. The gate, not the way, comes first, as in Matthew 7:13 and 14. In spiritual matters, if we do not enter the gate, there is no way for us to go on. The gate of the spiritual things related to life is regeneration; for the life within we need the gate of regeneration. After we are regenerated, however, after we receive the life within, we need to have a living, and for our living and daily life the gate is consecration. Many have been regenerated; that is, they have entered the gate of life. However, they do not have the proper living because they have never consecrated themselves to the Lord. They have passed through regeneration, but they have not passed through consecration. Although they are regenerated persons, they do not live as regenerated persons; that is, they have the life but not the living.

The gate for our spiritual living is consecration. Then after we enter the gate of consecration, we go on the way of consecration. Consecration has two aspects: a crisis to pass through and a way to walk on. The crisis is once for all, but the way is not once for all. Many cannot go the way of consecration because they have not entered the gate of consecration. Have you passed through the gate? As I mentioned before, Brother Watchman Nee held a training in Shanghai in 1939 and 1940 mostly for co-workers. For one year's time he stressed almost nothing but consecration. Every week when we came together, he would first ask a person to give his testimony about consecration. Brother Nee would ask us to consider the testimony, and then he himself would critique it. Almost no one passed this examination. We were all subdued by him. He would point out something in each testimony that proved that the consecration was not genuine, absolute, complete, or without reservation.

CHECKING OUR CONSECRATION AND BEING FAITHFUL TO IT

The way to check whether or not we are faithful and honest in our consecration to the Lord is by our daily life. If we check ourselves, we will see, as Brother Nee pointed out, that in many matters there is a struggle between us and the Lord, and we often win the victory. Whenever there is a struggle, the defeated one is the Lord. It is good to have a struggle with the Lord. If we have no struggle with Him, we are through with the Lord. Especially in this age on this earth there is always the struggle. To not have a struggle means that we are fallen and backslidden. In our struggle, however, who wins the victory, we or the Lord? The way to check whether or not our consecration is complete, genuine, and without reservation is by who wins the struggle. That the Lord is defeated is due to the unfaithfulness of our consecration. We

have consecrated ourselves, but we may not be faithful and honest to our consecration. If we Christians would keep our consecration, the Lord will always have the victory.

All our problems today are due to our unfaithfulness in consecration. We may not have a morning watch, for example, because of a problem with our consecration. Many of us have passed the crisis, but we have not continued on the way. Therefore, in order for a church to be built up, the first foundation we must lay is the matter of consecration. We need to check with ourselves and deal with our consecration, and then we need to help others. We need to pray, fellowship, and encourage the brothers and help them one by one to come into the real experience of consecration.

We may say that we do not have much faith. The reason we do not have faith is that we are not faithful to our consecration. When we are faithful to our consecration, we have a living faith. We may say that we do not have power. The reason again is that we are not faithful to our consecration. When we are faithful to our consecration, we have the ground to claim the power, and it is ours. We need to go to the Lord once again to deal with and clear up our consecration. If we do this, we will see the blessings. Then we will have a burden to help others.

ADVANCING STEP BY STEP IN OUR CONSECRATION

We may have consecrated ourselves to the Lord after we were regenerated, but the problem is whether or not we have continued in our consecration. The unfaithfulness to our consecration is the reason why many of us have not grown much and advanced on the Lord's way. We may compare this to someone who walks all the time but does not walk on the right way. We may come to the meetings, fellowship with the saints, and do many things in the Christian life, but we may not be on the proper way. To go on is a matter of consecration. Whenever the Lord points out something to us, we need to say, "Lord, I let You have it." If we do this, we advance by one step, but if we do not let the Lord have the victory, we are not on the way, regardless of how many things we do. To go on the proper Christian way is to take step after step in our consecration.

We have to go on by consecration day by day. A day without consecration is a wasted day. If we have a struggle with the Lord and we win the victory, making the Lord the defeated One, then regardless of how much we do for the Lord we will only waste our time. The measure of our life and going on is our consecration.

If we once again deal with our consecration, we will have a revival. Our outreach to bring people to the Lord and our consecration go together. If we have no real experience of consecration, we have no power to bring people to the Lord. Our power to bring people to the Lord depends on our consecration. If we struggle with the Lord and win, causing the Lord to be defeated, we are weak, and we lose the power to bring people to the Lord. However, if we always take the ground of consecration and go on step by step, we have the power to bring people to the Lord.

THE NEED FOR THE CONTINUAL BURNT OFFERING

As we have said, the crisis of consecration is the key to our other experiences, and it is a life-long, not once-for-all, experience. In the type of the people of Israel, they had to offer the burnt offering day by day, morning and evening (Lev. 6:9, 12-13). The altar was called the altar of burnt offering. The burnt offering was the continual offering, and the fire for the burnt offering was not supposed to cease; it had to stay burning day and night. This type shows us that we have to have a life of the burnt offering, a life with fire burning on the altar all day long. It is entirely right that as Christians we should consecrate ourselves every morning and again in the evening after the day's duties. We may think that this is too much, that we already have offered ourselves to the Lord for many years, but we still need to offer ourselves for each morning and each evening. In addition, although it is not legal, it is right that we should offer ourselves specifically for the Lord's Day and for the service and worship on that day. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1964*, vol. 4, "Practical Lessons on the Experience of Life," ch. 3, pp. 387-392)