

VIII. PRAYER AND CONSECRATION

"Eudamidas, a citizen of Corinth, died in poverty; but having two wealthy friends, Arctæus and Carixenus, left the following testament: In virtue of my last will, I bequeath to Arctæus my mother and to Carixenus my daughter to be taken home to their houses and supported for the remainder of their lives. This testament occasioned much mirth and laughter. The two legatees were pleased and affectionately executed the will. If heathens trusted each other, why should not I cherish a far greater confidence in my beloved Master, Jesus? I hereby, therefore, nominate Him my sole heir, consigning to Him my soul and my children and sisters, that He may adopt, protect, and provide for them by His mighty power unto salvation. The whole residue of the estate shall be entrusted to His holy counsel."--Gotthold

When we study the many-sidedness of prayer, we are surprised at the number of things with which it is connected. There is no phase of human life which it does not affect, and it has to do with everything affecting human salvation. Prayer and consecration are closely related. Prayer leads up to, and governs consecration. Prayer is precedent to consecration, accompanies it, and is a direct result of it. Much goes under the name of consecration which has no consecration in it. Much consecration of the present day is defective, superficial and spurious, worth nothing so far as the office and ends of consecration are concerned. Popular consecration is sadly at fault because it has little or no prayer in it. No consecration is worth a thought which is not the direct fruit of much praying, and which fails to bring one into a life of prayer. Prayer is the one thing prominent in a consecrated life.

Consecration is much more than a life of so-called service. It is a life of personal holiness, first of all. It is that which brings spiritual power into the heart and enlivens the entire inner man. It is a life which ever recognises God, and a life given up to true prayer.

Full consecration is the highest type of a Christian life. It is the one Divine standard of experience, of living and of service. It is the one thing at which the believer should aim. Nothing short of entire consecration must satisfy him.

Never is he to be contented till he is fully, entirely the Lord's by his own consent. His praying naturally and involuntarily leads up to this one act of his.

Consecration is the voluntary set dedication of one's self to God, an offering definitely made, and made without any reservation whatever. It is the setting apart of all we are, all we have, and all we expect to have or be, to God first of all. It is not so much the giving of ourselves to the Church, or the mere engaging in some one line of Church work. Almighty God is in view and He is the end of all consecration. It is a separation of one's self to God, a devotement of all that he is and has to a sacred use. Some things may be devoted to a special purpose, but it is not consecration in the true sense. Consecration has a sacred nature. It is devoted to holy ends. It is the voluntary putting of one's self in God's hands to be used sacredly, holily, with sanctifying ends in view.

Consecration is not so much the setting one's self apart from sinful things and wicked ends, but rather it is the separation from worldly, secular and even legitimate things, if they come in conflict with God's

plans, to holy uses. It is the devoting of all we have to God for His own specific use. It is a separation from things questionable, or even legitimate, when the choice is to be made between the things of this life and the claims of God.

The consecration which meets God's demands and which He accepts is to be full, complete, with no mental reservation, with nothing withheld. It cannot be partial, any more than a whole burnt offering in Old Testament times could have been partial. The whole animal had to be offered in sacrifice. To reserve any part of the animal would have seriously vitiated the offering. So to make a half-hearted, partial consecration is to make no consecration at all, and is to fail utterly in securing the Divine acceptance. It involves our whole being, all we have and all that we are. Everything is definitely and voluntarily placed in God's hands for His supreme use.

Consecration is not all there is in holiness. Many make serious mistakes at this point. Consecration makes us relatively holy. We are holy only in the sense that we are now closely related to God, in which we were not related heretofore. Consecration is the human side of holiness. In this sense, it is self-sanctification, and only in this sense. Sanctification or holiness in its truest and highest sense is Divine, the act of the Holy Spirit working in the heart, making it clean and putting therein in a higher degree the fruits of the Spirit.

This distinction is clearly set forth and kept in view by Moses in "Leviticus," wherein he shows the human and the Divine side of sanctification or holiness:

"Sanctify yourselves, therefore, and be ye holy, for I am the Lord your God. And ye shall keep my statutes and do them; I am the Lord which sanctify you."

Here we are to sanctify ourselves, and then in the next word we are taught that it is the Lord which sanctifies us. God does not consecrate us to His service. We do not sanctify ourselves in this highest sense. Here is the two-fold meaning of sanctification, and a distinction which needs to be always kept in mind.

Consecration being the intelligent, voluntary act of the believer, this act is the direct result of praying. No prayerless man ever conceives the idea of a full consecration. Prayerlessness and consecration have nothing whatever in common. A life of prayer naturally leads up to full consecration. It leads nowhere else. In fact, a life of prayer is satisfied with nothing else but an entire dedication of one's self to God. Consecration recognises fully God's ownership to us. It cheerfully assents to the truth set forth by Paul:

"Ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body and spirit, which are God's."

And true praying leads that way. It cannot reach any other destination. It is bound to run into this depot. This is its natural result. This is the sort of work which praying turns out. Praying makes consecrated people. It cannot make any other sort. It drives to this end. It aims at this very purpose.

As prayer leads up to and brings forth full consecration, so prayer entirely impregnates a consecrated life. The prayer life and the

consecrated life are intimate companions. They are Siamese twins, inseparable. Prayer enters into every phase of a consecrated life. A prayerless life which claims consecration is a misnomer, false, counterfeit.

Consecration is really the setting apart of one's self to a life of prayer. It means not only to pray, but to pray habitually, and to pray more effectually. It is the consecrated man who accomplishes most by His praying. God must hear the man wholly given up to God. God cannot deny the requests of him who has renounced all claims to himself, and who has wholly dedicated himself to God and His service. This act of the consecrated man puts him "on praying ground and pleading terms" with God. It puts Him in reach of God in prayer. It places him where he can get hold of God, and where he can influence God to do things which He would not otherwise do. Consecration brings answers to prayer. God can depend upon consecrated men. God can afford to commit Himself in prayer to those who have fully committed themselves to God. He who gives all to God will get all from God. Having given all to God, he can claim all that God has for him.

As prayer is the condition of full consecration, so prayer is the habit, the rule, of him who has dedicated himself wholly to God. Prayer is becoming in the consecrated life. Prayer is no strange thing in such a life. There is a peculiar affinity between prayer and consecration, for both recognise God, both submit to God, and both have their aim and end in God. Prayer is part and parcel of the consecrated life. Prayer is the constant, the inseparable, the intimate companion of consecration. They walk and talk together.

There is much talk today of consecration, and many are termed consecrated people who know not the alphabet of it. Much modern consecration falls far below the Scripture standard. There is really no real consecration in it. Just as there is much praying without any real prayer in it, so there is much so-called consecration current, today, in the Church which has no real consecration in it. Much for consecration in the Church which receives the praise and plaudits of superficial, formal professors, but which is wide of the mark. There is much hurrying to and fro, here and there, much fuss and feathers, much going about and doing many things, and those who busy themselves after this fashion are called consecrated men and women. The central trouble with all this false consecration is that there is no prayer in it, nor is it in any sense the direct result of praying. People can do many excellent and commendable things in the Church and be utter strangers to a life of consecration, just as they can do many things and be prayerless.

Here is the true test of consecration. It is a life of prayer. Unless prayer be pre-eminent, unless prayer is to the front, the consecration is faulty, deceptive, falsely named. Does he pray? That is the test-question of every so-called consecrated man. Is he a man of prayer? No consecration is worth a thought if it be devoid of prayer. Yea, more--if it be not pre-eminently and primarily a life of prayer.

God wants consecrated men because they can pray and will pray. He can use consecrated men because He can use praying men. As prayerless men are in His way, hinder Him, and prevent the success of His cause, so likewise unconsecrated men are useless to Him, and hinder Him in carrying out His gracious plans, and in executing His noble purposes in redemption. God wants consecrated men because He wants praying men.

Consecration and prayer meet in the same man. Prayer is the tool with which the consecrated man works. Consecrated men are the agents through whom prayer works. Prayer helps the consecrated man in maintaining his attitude of consecration, keeps him alive to God, and aids him in doing the work to which he is called and to which he has given himself. Consecration helps to effectual praying. Consecration enables one to get the most out of his praying.

"Let Him to whom we now belong
His sovereign right assert;
And take up every thankful song,
And every loving heart.
"He justly claims us for His own,
Who bought us with a price;
The Christian lives to Christ alone,
To Christ alone he dies."

We must insist upon it that the prime purpose of consecration is not service in the ordinary sense of that word. Service in the minds of not a few means nothing more than engaging in some of the many forms of modern Church activities. There are a multitude of such activities, enough to engage the time and mind of anyone, yea, even more than enough. Some of these may be good, others not so good. The present-day Church is filled with machinery, organisations, committees and societies, so much so that the power it has is altogether insufficient to run the machinery, or to furnish life sufficient to do all this external work. Consecration has a much higher and nobler end than merely to expend itself in these external things.

Consecration aims at the right sort of service--the Scriptural kind. It seeks to serve God, but in entirely a different sphere than that which is in the minds of present-day Church leaders and workers. The very first sort of service mentioned by Zachariah, father of John the Baptist, in his wonderful prophecy and statement in Luke 1:74, was thus:

"That he would grant unto us, that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness, all the days of our life."

Here we have the idea of "serving God in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life."

And the same kind of service is mentioned in Luke's strong tribute to the father and mother of John the Baptist before the latter's birth:

"And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless."

And Paul, in writing to the Philippians, strikes the same keynote in putting the emphasis on blamelessness of life:

"Do all things without murmurings and disputings, that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life."

We must mention a truth which is strangely overlooked in these days by what are called personal workers, that in the Epistles of Paul and others, it is not what are called Church activities which are brought to the front, but rather the personal life. It is good behaviour, righteous conduct, holy living, godly conversation, right tempers--things which belong primarily to the personal life in religion. Everywhere this is emphasised, put in the forefront, made much of and insisted on. Religion first of all puts one to living right. Religion shows itself in the life. Thus is religion to prove its reality, its sincerity and its Divinity.

"So let our lips and lives express

The holy Gospel we profess;

So let our works and virtues shine

To prove the doctrine all Divine.

"Thus shall we best proclaim abroad

The honors of our Saviour God;

When the salvation reigns within

And grace subdues the power of sin."

The first great end of consecration is holiness of heart and of life. It is to glorify God, and this can be done in no more effectual way than by a holy life flowing from a heart cleansed from all sin. The great burden of heart pressed on every one who becomes a Christian lies right here. This he is to ever keep in mind, and to further this kind of life and this kind of heart, he is to watch, to pray, and to bend all his diligence in using all the means of grace. He who is truly and fully consecrated, lives a holy life. He seeks after holiness of heart. Is not satisfied without it. For this very purpose he consecrates himself to God. He gives himself entirely over to God in order to be holy in heart and in life.

As holiness of heart and of life is thoroughly impregnated with prayer, so consecration and prayer are closely allied in personal religion. It takes prayer to bring one into such a consecrated life of holiness to the Lord, and it takes prayer to maintain such a life. Without much prayer, such a life of holiness will break down. Holy people are praying people. Holiness of heart and life puts people to praying. Consecration puts people to praying in earnest.

Prayerless people are strangers to anything like holiness of heart and cleanness of heart. Those who are unfamiliar with the closet are not at all interested in consecration and holiness. Holiness thrives in the place of secret prayer. The environments of the closet of prayer are favourable to its being and its culture. In the closet holiness is found. Consecration brings one into holiness of heart, and prayer stands hard by when it is done.

The spirit of consecration is the spirit of prayer. The law of consecration is the law of prayer. Both laws work in perfect harmony without the slightest jar or discord. Consecration is the practical expression of true prayer. People who are consecrated are known by their praying habits. Consecration thus expresses itself in prayer. He who is not interested in prayer has no interest in consecration. Prayer creates an interest in consecration, then prayer brings one into a state of heart where consecration is a subject of delight, bringing joy of heart, satisfaction of soul, contentment of spirit. The consecrated soul is the happiest soul. There is no friction whatever between him who is fully given over to God and God's will. There is perfect harmony between the will of such a man and God, and His will. And the two wills being in perfect accord, this brings rest of soul, absence of friction, and the presence of perfect peace.

"Lord, in the strength of grace,

With a glad heart and free,

Myself, my residue of days,

I consecrate to Thee.

"Thy ransomed servant, I

Restore to Thee Thy own;

And from this moment, live or die,

To serve my God alone."