

## *Baptismal Discourse*

Opening Hymn: #14 — “Full Surrender”

One hundred forty years ago there was a terrible battle between Americans who lived in the north and Americans who lived in the south. It was fought in south-central Pennsylvania near the Maryland border about 100 miles from here. The Union forces won that battle, but at great cost: 23,000 soldiers were either wounded, missing, or dead on the fields of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. The 16th president of the United States left the capital in Washington and travelled to Gettysburg to dedicate a national cemetery. It is said he penned his notes on the back of an envelope. His short speech has been known ever since as the Gettysburg Address. In it he said:

“We have come to dedicate a portion of this field as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives that [our] nation might live. But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate—we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, HAVE CONSECRATED it far above our poor power to add or detract.”

Stirring words, yet except for Lincoln’s use of it, “consecration” is a word rarely heard today. The dictionary defines it as:

**con’se’crate** to make or declare sacred; set apart or dedicate to the service of the Deity.

**con’se’cra’tion** act of consecrating; dedication to the service and worship of God.

This is a scriptural word. In its various forms the word appears about 40 times but only twice in the New Testament. Most of the time the word appears in connection with the consecration of the priesthood of the Israelites.

The Tabernacle in the wilderness was “church” for the nation of Israel. All the members of the tribe of Levi had no inheritance in the promised land. They were the servants of the Tabernacle. The high priest and the underpriests were taken from this tribe. We read about the special priestly dedication ceremony in Leviticus chapter 8. Here is what it says:

Lev. 8:33 And ye shall not go out of the door of the tabernacle of the congregation in seven days, until the days of your **consecration** be at an end; for seven days shall he **consecrate** you.

In our fellowship, consecration means the complete dedication of oneself to God. At every Memorial service we are reminded of the special relationship we have with the Heavenly Father. As we individually partake of the unleavened bread, we see ourselves broken in the sense that we have given up our own will so we might do God’s will.

Rom. 6:13 (Weymouth) And no longer offer your faculties as instruments of wickedness for sin to use, but rather offer yourselves to God as living men risen from the dead, and your faculties to God as instruments of righteousness.

Prov. 23:26 My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways.

These scriptures urge us to consecration. They describe far more than a positive “attitude.” Most of us can remember the precise time we made up our minds to dedicate ourselves to God and at that moment took a vow of consecration that His will would become our will.

Psa. 56:11,12 *reflects the attitude of those who accept this offer and who consecrate themselves:*  
 In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me. Thy vows are upon me, O God: I will render praises unto thee.

Many religious groups require emotionalism to convince others to take their “stand” for Christ. Though motivated by stirring eloquence, these souls often drift back to their former habits soon after they leave the meeting.

Consecration is not a trivial matter. It is a lifetime contract. Unlike some “lifetime” vows which are easily broken, the Lord will require us to perform what we have promised.

Ecc. 5:4,5 When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.

If we fully submit our wills, we have the benefit of all God’s promises to watch over us.

Prov. 23:23 Buy the truth and sell it not.

Buy the truth? What does it cost? The Lord gave a parable to impress upon us the necessity of knowing just what is involved if we decide to follow him:

Luke 14:25-31 (Moffat) There were large crowds traveling with him; so he turned and said to them, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate (“love less”—Strong) his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, 1) **aye and his own life**, he cannot be a disciple of mine; whoever does not 2) **carry his own cross** and come after me, he cannot be a disciple of mine. For which of you wants to build a tower and does not first sit down to calculate the expense, to see if he has enough money to complete it?—in case, after he has laid the foundation and then is unable to finish the building, all the spectators start to make fun of him, saying, “This fellow started to build but he could not finish it.”

God’s word shows that we would not be called to consecrate if it were not possible to “pay” our vows. As our appreciation of God deepens, we begin to see how little it costs. In his letter to the Romans, Paul gives his judgment about the cost:

Rom. 8:18,31 For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. What shall we then say to these things? Since God be for us, who can be against us?

John 1:11,12 He came unto his own and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he **privilege** [margin] to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.

We do not consecrate to a person, to a particular work, to a group of people we like, or to any organization. We have no “creed” which must be signed. We consecrate ourselves to God. There are many dedicated people in this world, but they are not dedicated to God. From the moment we give ourselves to God, we must use our best judgment to carry out the terms of this “contract.” We must do what we understand to be the Lord’s will. There will be others, of course, who will try to make our decisions for us, but carrying out our consecration is a personal responsibility!

“We heard recently of a dear couple who have an infant child, which properly they very dearly love. The mother was shocked by some sisters intimating to her that it should be considered a disgrace to be a mother, in view of our expectation of great changes shortly. [this was written in 1913] We believe that those dear sisters made a mistake. They, of course, have a right to **think for themselves** and to **shape their own courses** in life according to their best judgment of the Lord’s will. But they have **no right to censure others** for having a different opinion on the subject. **To his own Master each servant stands or falls.**” (R5353)

The best term to describe our relationship to God after he accepts our consecration is “steward.”

stew·ard one who manages another’s property or financial affairs; one who administers anything as the agent of another or others.

We consecrate or give God everything we have, and he gives it back to us, setting us up as stewards. Then he observes how we use what we have in His service. Here is the way that process is described in the parable of the talents:

Matt. 25:14-29 (selectively) For the kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability. After a long time the lord of those servants returneth and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five . . . His lord said unto him, “Well done” . . . he also that had received two talents came and said, . . . “Behold I have gained two other talents beside them.” His lord said unto him, “Well done.” . . . And then he which had received the one talent came and said . . . “I was afraid and went and hid thy talent in the earth.” . . . His lord said unto him, “Thou wicked and slothful servant.”

There are many lessons here. Both the one who had been given five talents and the one who had two received the same words of praise. But the failure of the one who had the least shows how important it is for everyone one of us to do our best even if we think we have so little. Note: the unfaithful servant “hid it in the earth.” He did absolutely nothing with it. The lord himself gained nothing by giving the servant something.

There is no way to measure or compare one sacrifice with another. There is an interesting illustration of this in the offering of incense on the day of atonement:

Lev. 16:12 And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the Lord, and **his hands full** of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the veil; and he shall put the incense upon the fire before the Lord.

How much incense is there in two hands full? We don't know exactly. It depends on the size of one's hands. Each of us offers a different quantity compared to another sacrificer.

Who may consecrate? This privilege is not extended to just anyone:

Heb. 5:4 No man taken this honour unto himself but he that **is called** of God as was Aaron.  
(*Aaron, of course, was the first high priest.*)

1 Cor. 1:22-26 (Moffatt) Jews demand miracles and Greeks want wisdom, but our message is Christ the crucified—a stumbling block to the Jews, “sheer folly” to the Gentiles, but for those **who are called**, whether Jews or Greeks, a Christ who is the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the “foolishness” of God is wiser than men, and the “weakness” of God is stronger than men. Why, look at your own ranks, my brothers; not many wise men (that is, judged by human standards), not many leading men, not many of good birth, **have been called.**”

The emphasis here is on the calling of God. God's message of truth was hidden from the majority of the Jews at the first advent. It is also hidden now during the time of his second advent. It is hidden from all except the few God calls and to whom he reveals his purposes.

[*Optional parable of the rich young ruler in Matt. 19:16-22, The man was attracted, but thought the “cost” was too much.*]

Those who can see that God has been attracting them to Him are the ones addressed in...

Rom. 12:1,2 (Diaglott) I entreat you, therefore, Brethren, by the tender compassions of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice holy, well-pleasing to God—your rational religious service. And do not conform yourselves to this age, but transform yourselves by the renovation of your mind, that you may ascertain what is the will of God—the good, and well-pleasing, and perfect.

2 Cor. 9:7 God loveth a cheerful giver. (*Applies to the giving of one's life, not just cash!*)

Those who offer themselves to God possess FAITH:

Heb. 11:6 Without faith it is impossible to please him, for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

And HUMILITY:

Psa. 51:17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

No scripture says how much KNOWLEDGE we need before we can present ourselves in consecration. Some have said that one must read the Bible from cover to cover before one can consecrate; others say we must read and understand all six volumes of *Studies in the Scriptures*. If all of God's children must read the volumes before they God could accept their consecration, how any could consecrate before they were written?

BAPTISM goes hand-in-hand with the topic of consecration. Generally individuals are baptized as soon as possible after they have made a consecration. Baptism is only an outward sign of something that has previously taken place within the heart. Those who will be baptized today did not make up their minds to do so because of something they heard today. They consecrated themselves before coming to this convention and with joy want to acknowledge that step to all the Lord's people gathered here.

There is, of course, no scripture that says one **must** be baptized, but it is highly recommended:

Matt. 3:16,17 (*Baptism of Jesus*) And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and lo the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him; and lo a voice from heaven saying, This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.

Acts 9:18 (*Baptism of Paul*) And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.

Acts 8:35,36 (*Baptism of the Eunuch*) Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized.

Acts 2:41 (*Baptism of new converts*) Then they that gladly received his word were baptized.

Baptism is only a symbol of a consecration that has already been made. We keep no written records nor is it necessary for anyone to produce proof of his baptism before being accepted in fellowship by the brethren. Class elections and the celebration of the Memorial are reserved for the consecrated, but it is up to the individual to say whether he is consecrated or not. Baptism is a matter between the individual and the Lord. Paul gives us a further explanation of this symbol of baptism:

Gal. 3:26,27 For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Rom. 6:3,5 Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.

This scripture shows us that baptism is much more than water immersion.

Consecration is summed up in:

Joshua 24:15 Choose you this day whom ye will serve . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

It has been termed “reasonable” by Paul, and so we see it to be, for consecration is really the doing of God’s will as we perceive it to be. Since evil now flourishes, it also means persecution, and sacrifice—the sacrifice of earthly advantage, pleasures, opportunities, and especially of life here on earth. That’s why we call this a “high calling.” In return God has promised a special reward for those who give themselves wholly to him. Yet none of us takes this step because we see it as a shrewd trade: our worthless life for something of great value. Regardless what may be given in the future to the consecrated child of God, we know that in this life God gives us a peace, contentment, love and fellowship far beyond what the world offers. Brother Russell has termed this the “present inheritance” of the saints.

Our consecration is only the start of Christian development. We must rededicate ourselves every day.

Psa. 61:5,8 For thou, O God, hast heard my vows: thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear thy name. So will I sing praise unto thy name for ever, that I may **daily** perform my vows.

“My earliest thought I desire shall be, what shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?”

1 Cor. 15:31 I die daily!

“To fulfill faithfully the duties of your station;

2) to use to the uttermost the gifts of your ministry;

3) to bear chafing annoyances and trivial irritations as martyrs bore the pillory and stake;

4) to find the one noble trait in people who try to molest you;

5) to put the kindest construction on unkind acts and words;

6) to love with the love of God even the unthankful and evil;

7) to be content to be a fountain in the midst of a wild valley of stones, nourishing a few wild flowers, or now and again a thirsty sheep;

8) and to do this always and not for the praise of man, but for the sake of God;—this makes a consecrated life.” (R3603—F.B. Meyer)

*[Go to front row and introduce the candidates.]*

Will the candidates for baptism please stand. We want to ask a few simple questions:

1. Do you acknowledge your sinful condition from which you cannot save yourself?
2. Do you recognize Jesus Christ as the one who died to redeem mankind and have you personally accepted his sacrifice on your behalf.
3. Having done this, have you presented yourself in consecration to God as a living sacrifice to do His will even unto death?

[Extend the right hand of fellowship. Give little cards with scriptures.]

Closing Hymn: #224 — “All of Thee”

*[First delivered at the Florida convention, March, 1994]*

1 John 3:1

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

Isaiah 54:10

My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.

Col. 3:23,24

Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.

Psalm 121:7,8

The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.

1 Cor. 2:9

Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

Numbers 6:24-26

The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

1 Samuel 12:24

[Reverence] the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you.

Psalm 37:4,5

Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.

Psalm 84:11

The Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.

Psalm 91:4

He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.