

# The Experience of Life:

**T**he full ministry of Christ is in three stages, and our participation in each stage of this ministry directly corresponds to our willingness to be constrained by the love of Christ to initially consecrate ourselves to the Lord and then to progressively deepen that consecration as the Lord in His mercy brings us further into His economy. The stage of incarnation satisfies a sinner's need for judicial redemption. When Christ is openly portrayed as crucified and a sinner believes into the Lord, an initial experience of consecration is normal. When the God of glory appeared to Abram, his response was simply to build an altar. The stage of inclusion involves the producing of the churches through the experience of the pneumatic Christ in resurrection. Resurrection is an entrance into the new creation and thus there is a separation from the elements of the world. Such a separation requires a deeper consecration. When Abram separated himself from Lot, the Lord again appeared to him and showed him the good land, and Abram's response was to build an altar. In the stage of intensification, overcomers are produced so that the Body of Christ can be built up in a practical way. This requires the utter abandonment of our very selves in which nothing is held back from the Lord. When Abraham responded to the Lord's command to offer his son Isaac, he did not withhold him from the Lord. Instead he built a final altar. Our need for consecration is not limited to our initial experience of salvation, it is an ongoing need for all who desire to further the Lord's move in this age to consummate it for His expression and glory. This article is taken from the 1968 edition of *The Experience of Life* published by Living Stream Ministry.

**T**he second stage of the experience of life usually begins with consecration. Many Christians wait until they are consecrated before they abide in Christ, have fellowship with Christ, and thus enjoy and experience Christ. We can say, therefore, that the first experience of the second stage of spiritual life is consecration. In a normal condition these two experiences, salvation and consecration, are closely related. A saved person should be a consecrated person. Once a person is saved, he should consecrate himself to the Lord. To be saved without being consecrated is a very abnormal condition. Our gospel work must be done strongly to such an extent that people will immediately consecrate themselves as soon as they are saved.



by Witness Lee

Concerning the experience of consecration there are five main points: the basis of consecration, the motive of consecration, the meaning of consecration, the purpose of consecration, and the result of consecration. These five points include all the content of consecration. We come now to look into this experience of consecration according to these points.

## The Basis of Consecration—God's Purchase

The first main point is the basis of consecration. On what basis must we consecrate ourselves to God? On what basis does God require us to consecrate ourselves to Him? We need to have a basis for whatever we do. For example, when we move into a house and live in it, it is because we have paid a price and rented or bought it. This renting or purchasing is the basis upon which we live there. When a creditor takes action to obtain payment of debt from someone, it is because the other party is indebted to him. The debt is the creditor's basis for seeking payment. Our God is one who is most legal and one who acts most reasonably. All His doings are legal and have a basis. He cannot obtain something in the universe without paying a price, and He also cannot demand something from us without a basis. When God, therefore, demands that we consecrate ourselves to Him, it cannot be without a basis. In this matter, He has a very solid basis, that is, His purchase. He has already bought us. He can, therefore, demand that we consecrate ourselves to Him.

First Corinthians 6:20 says: "Ye were bought with a price." Our consecration is based on this purchase of God. For instance, you may go to the gospel bookroom and see a

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great number of books on display, but you cannot help yourself to any of them, because you have no basis for doing so. But if you pay three dollars for one of the volumes, then you can demand that the book be turned over to you and claim that it belongs to you. This demanding is based upon your purchase. The basis of consecration is exactly the same. How can God demand that we consecrate ourselves to Him? The reason is that He has bought us. Some think that the reason for consecrating ourselves to God is because God has created us. This is not right. Consecration is not based on God's creation; it is based on God's purchase. In Exodus 13:2 we see that after the Passover, God commanded the Israelites, saying, "Sanctify unto me all the first-born." The reason for this command is that all these first-born were redeemed by God through the death of the lamb. They were bought by God with the blood of the lamb. To purchase is to acquire the right of ownership. When God has bought us, He then has the right of ownership, that is, He has a basis to demand that we turn ourselves over to Him to belong to Him. The basis of consecration, therefore, is God's purchase. God has bought us with none other than the precious blood shed by His beloved Son on the cross (1 Pet. 1:19). How great "a price" (1 Cor. 6:20) is this precious blood! God used this precious blood as the price to buy us, that we may belong to Him.

**W**e may further ask, From what did God buy us? Some think that God has bought us from the rule of Satan, or that God has bought us from the bondage of sin, or that God has bought us from the world. But these concepts are not in accordance with the truth. To purchase a thing implies the recognition that the original right of ownership is legal; therefore, one must use the legal means—purchasing—to obtain that right of ownership. The rule of Satan, the bondage of sin, and the usurpation of the world are all illegal. God never admits that these are legal. It is not necessary, therefore, for God to purchase us with a price from Satan, sin, and the world. Satan, sin and the world seized us by illegal means, captured us, and dominated us. God saved us from these by the saving work of the Lord at the cross. In this aspect, therefore, it is salvation and not purchase.

From what then has God bought us? Galatians 4:5 says, "That he might redeem them that were under the law." This verse reveals that God has redeemed us from under the law; God has bought us from under the law. Why is it that God has redeemed us from the law? The reason is that when we sinned and fell, we not only came under Satan, sin, and the world and became their captives, but we also offended God's righteousness, transgressed God's law, and became sinners. Because we became sinners, we fell under God's law and were kept and retained by this law. The fact that we were thus retained by the law of God is altogether righteous and legal. If God, therefore,

wanted to release us from under His righteous law, He must pay the full price to satisfy the demand of His law. This price is the precious blood shed by His Son. Since this blood satisfied the requirements of the law, we are redeemed from under His righteous law, that is, we are bought from under the law. Since the day we obtained redemption, we have been released from the rule of the law, we are no longer under its authority. Formerly we belonged to the law, but now we belong to God. The right of ownership over us has been transferred from the law to the hand of God. It is on the basis of this transfer of right that God demands that we consecrate ourselves to Him. God's right of ownership over us through purchase, therefore, is the basis upon which we should consecrate ourselves to God.

When we lead others to consecrate themselves, or when we examine our own consecration, we must attend to this basis of consecration. We must realize that we were bought by God and that the right of ownership over us has been transferred to God. We are no longer, therefore, in our own hands. We are no longer our own. When we thus realize the basis of consecration, our consecration is stable and secure.

If we were to investigate the consecration experiences of Christians, we would discover that most were constrained by the love of the Lord. This motive is truly good and reasonable. But if we were to consecrate ourselves to the Lord only because of the constraint of the Lord's love, would this consecration be sufficiently stable? Experience tells us that it is not. The reason is that love is the story of our heart's mood and desire. When we are happy, we love; when we are not happy, we do not love. Today, we are in the mood to love, so we consecrate ourselves; tomorrow, we are not in the mood to love, so we do not consecrate ourselves. Therefore, if consecration is purely a matter of love, it will not be sufficiently stable. It will be subject to as much change as our unstable mood. When we understand the basis of consecration and realize that consecration is based on the matter of purchase, our consecration will then be stable and secure. A purchase is not a matter of mood, but a matter of ownership. God has already bought us and has the right to own us. Therefore, whether we are happy or not, we must consecrate ourselves.

I feel deeply that not many of those brothers and sisters among us who have already consecrated themselves truly realize God's right of ownership. We must return, therefore, and make up this lesson. Our consecration must not only be because of the love of the Lord; we must realize that God verily has the right to possess us. Following the Lord is not always exciting, and serving Him is not always pleasant. Even those of us who have served the Lord for many years sometimes feel that it is really not easy to serve the Lord, but the urge within forbids us to do otherwise.

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We often feel like giving up, but we cannot. The reason is that we have realized God has a right to us. We were bought by God, and we belong to Him; therefore, whether we like it or not, we cannot but consecrate ourselves and serve Him. In the world today, people get married when they feel like it and divorced when they feel like it. They act according to their mood without recognizing any right of ownership. Our consecration must not be like that. True consecration must sooner or later rest on the realization of God's right to us, based on His purchase. Whether we are in a happy mood or not, this fact remains the same. When we stand before the judgment seat to be judged by the Lord regarding our consecration, judgment will not be on the basis of whether we love Him or not, or whether we liked to be consecrated or not; it will be based on the fact of whether we were bought by Him or not. If we were bought by Him, we can do nothing but consecrate ourselves; we have nothing to say. From now on, therefore, whenever we speak about consecration, we must not neglect this basis.

When we read these words regarding the basis of consecration, we may understand with our mind and receive with our heart, but this is still not adequate. We cannot say that we thus have the basis of consecration. We need to experience this basis practically in our daily life. Each time something occurs that causes us to argue with God, we must bow before Him and say: "Lord, I am the slave You bought. My right of ownership has been purchased by You. I here and now declare Your right. Even in this matter I will let You be the Lord and decide for me." Every time we depart from the position of consecration, we should feel that we are in a state of rebellion similar to that of Onesimus, the slave who fled from his master, Philemon. Whenever we are confronted with the opportunity to make a choice, we should consider this basis of consecration, this purchase, as the foundation rock under our feet. We must stand securely thereon, never daring to depart from it. If we experience consecration in such a sincere way, we have truly laid hold of the basis of consecration.

At the time John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, was being martyred, he expressed that regardless of how God treated him, he would still only worship Him. He realized that he was but a purchased slave, one over whom God had the complete right of ownership. However God treated him, he had nothing to say; he only worshipped. He knew that to make his own choice meant to escape and that to accept God's will meant consecration. For this cause he let God do all the choosing for him and was willing to accept His arrangement, whatever it might be. Until death he stood on the foundation rock of the basis of consecration. He really was one who knew God's right and the basis of consecration. Our realization of the basis of consecration must also go to the same extent.

## The Motive of Consecration—God's Love

The motive of consecration refers to one's heart in consecration. In order to have a good consecration, we not only need to realize its basis, we also need to have a motive. Although one knows the basis of consecration as having been bought and redeemed by God, yet this realization may not be sufficient to touch his feeling, move his heart, and cause him to consecrate himself willingly to God. If the things which God purchased were inanimate objects, such as a chair or a garment, He could proceed directly to use them as He pleases. But what God has redeemed today are living persons, each with a mind, an affection, and a will. Although God wants to have us, we may not be happy to let Him have us. Although God has the legal right and basis to possess us, we may not have the heart to let Him do so. Therefore, when God desires us to consecrate ourselves to Him, He must move our heart. He must give us the motive of love that we might be willing to consecrate ourselves to Him.

**T**he motive of consecration is the love of God. Whenever the Holy Spirit sheds abroad the love of God in our hearts, we will naturally be willing to become the prisoners of love and consecrate ourselves to God. This kind of consecration, motivated by the love of God, is mentioned very clearly in two places in the Scriptures: 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 and Romans 12:1. Second Corinthians 5:14-15 says: "For the love of Christ constraineth us (constraineth in the original has the meaning of the rushing of waters)...and He died for all, that they that live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto him who for their sakes died and rose again." In other words, these verses tell us that the dying love of Christ is like the rushing of great waters toward us, impelling us to consecrate ourselves to God and to live for Him beyond our own control. Romans 12:1 says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice." The mercies referred to here are the love of God. Therefore, in this place also, Paul is seeking to move our hearts with the love of God. He would cause us to have the motive of love, so that we might consecrate ourselves willingly to God as a living sacrifice. We see from these two passages that the love of God is the motive of consecration.

In a normal consecration this motive of love is very necessary. If our consecration rests solely on the basis of consecration, the realization of God's right to us, this consecration will only be based on reason; it will lack sweetness and intensity. But if our consecration has love as its motive, if our feelings have been touched by the love of God, the constraint of this love will cause us to consecrate ourselves willingly to God. This consecration will then be sweet and intense.

The marriage relationship of a husband and wife is a case

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in point. If it rests solely on the basis of right, it will be difficult for their life to be harmonious and sweet. A true marriage relationship not only rests on the basis of right, but the more on love. Because the wife loves her husband, she becomes one with him and lives with him. So it is in a true consecration to God. When we touch the love of God and see that He truly is lovely, we will then consecrate ourselves to Him. Thus, although consecration based on love changes according to our mood, yet, on the other hand, intense consecration is the result of constraining love. Those who have not had the experience of being constrained by the love of the Lord will not have a consecration that is good and intense. This is quite evident.

Number 101 in our hymnbook (*When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*) tells also a story of consecration because of the love of the Lord. It says that whenever I think of that love which saved me, I count everything but loss, because this love is so great. It goes on to say that I see His condition on the cross, His head, His hands, and His feet flowing with sorrow, love, and blood. All this because He loves me! Having seen such a love as this, if I offered to Him the entire universe, I would still feel ashamed, because His love is so noble, so excelling. If I should seek to repay His love, then I do not recognize His love; I even defile it. His love is like a priceless pearl, while my consecration is like filthy rags—we are simply unworthy of Him. One day, when the Spirit sheds this love abroad in our hearts, we too will have such intense consecration.

Even after we have consecrated ourselves and have followed the Lord in the way of consecration, we need unceasingly the constraint of His love in order that we may touch its sweetness. In the way of consecration one often suffers pain and loss, and only those who frequently touch the love of the Lord can find sweetness in their pain. Though the early apostles were much despised and imprisoned, they considered their suffering a glorious and joyful thing, since they were deemed worthy to be insulted for the Lord's name (Acts 5:40-41). The martyrs throughout the generations could joyfully accept the suffering of death and were not willing to forsake the Lord's name, because they had touched the sweetness of the Lord and had been constrained by His love. The love between us and the Lord, therefore, must always be renewed. The motive of love must be maintained in us in order that our consecration and service may always be fresh and sweet.

**I**n conclusion, a stable and intense consecration requires these two aspects: one aspect is to have a basis, that is, to realize that I myself have been bought by God, that I belong to Him, and that I ought to consecrate myself to Him; the other aspect is to have a motive, that is, to see that the love of God toward me is indeed very great, and that this love constrains me so that I willingly consecrate myself to Him.

## The Meaning of Consecration—to Be a Sacrifice

When one sees the basis of consecration and also has the motive of consecration, he is willing to consecrate himself to God. What then is consecration? What is the meaning of consecration? Romans 12:1 says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice." This verse shows us that the meaning of consecration is to be a "sacrifice."

What does the phrase "to be a sacrifice" mean? What is a sacrifice? The Scripture shows us that whenever a thing is set apart from its original position and usage and is laid on God's altar, specifically for Him, this thing is then a sacrifice. In the Old Testament men offered bullocks and rams as sacrifices. The principle is this: The bullock originally lived in a corral and was used for plowing the field and drawing carts. Now it is taken out from the corral and brought beside the altar. There is a change in its position. Then it is killed, placed on the altar, and consumed by fire to be a sweet-smelling savor unto God. This is a change in its usage. Thus this bullock becomes a sacrifice. A sacrifice, therefore, is none other than a thing which is set apart for God and laid on the altar, with a change in position and a change in usage. Whether it is a bullock or a ram, whether it is fine flour or oil, once it is offered as a sacrifice, it leaves the hands of the offerer and can no longer be used for his own advantage and enjoyment. All the sacrifices on the altar belong to God and are for His use and enjoyment. To put it simply, to be a sacrifice means to be offered to God for His use.

**W**hen we present ourselves to God as a living sacrifice, there are also these two aspects: one is a change in our position, and the other is a change in our usage. When we understand this meaning of consecration, we can then discern the genuineness of the consecration of others. When a person says he is consecrated, we may ask whether he has changed his position and changed his usage. If not, he is not a sacrifice, and there is no true consecration. Nothing is offered as a sacrifice without a change in position and in usage. Those who truly offer themselves, therefore, must pass completely out of their own hands and into God's hands for His use.

Such a consecration is similar to the giving of gifts. When we give a gift to others, it changes position from our hands to theirs. It is no longer ours to use; it is for their use. In like manner, the day we truly consecrate ourselves, our position is changed. Formerly we were in our own hands; now we are in the hands of God. Formerly we walked in our own way; now we lie on God's altar. At the same time, our usage is also changed. Formerly we lived for ourselves and were toward the world; now we are set apart solely for God. Only this kind of consecration is true consecration.

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When we thus present ourselves to God as a sacrifice, we become food for God; we are for His satisfaction. Among the offerings of the Israelites, some were for God's use, such as gold, silver, precious stones, threads of all colors, wool, and sheepskin (Exo. 25:2-7); and some were offered to God for food, such as the bullock, ram, pigeon, and turtledove used in the burnt offerings. When these were offered as a burnt offering, they were burnt on the altar and became a sweet savor, food for God (Lev. 3:11). When God accepted the sweet savor of these sacrifices, He was satisfied.

The offering of these sacrifices is a type of our consecration. The meaning, therefore, of offering ourselves as a sacrifice is offering ourselves to God as food which He will be pleased to accept and thus find satisfaction. We are people who were originally like a pile of uncooked rice, which might be used for this or for that. One day, because of God's need, we were separated from the original pile of rice and were worked on in such a way that we were cooked and placed on God's table—the altar—and became God's food for His satisfaction. This is the meaning of being a sacrifice, and this is the meaning of consecration.

Since the meaning of consecration is to offer ourselves to God as a living sacrifice for God's satisfaction, we should ask ourselves this question: Since our consecration, how much of our actual living and actual experiences have proved that we have indeed laid ourselves on the altar to be a sacrifice for God? Are we indeed willing to be God's food that He might be satisfied? True consecration is never compelled by God; it is of our voluntary will. God takes nothing by force; everything is offered up by men willingly. Likewise, our consecration today must be made out of our voluntary will; it is we who willingly lie on the altar and dare not move off. Others may move about freely, but we dare not act in a casual way. Others may calculate and choose between the sweet and the bitter, but when we encounter a difficulty, we dare not consider escape. Others can reason and argue with God; we dare not say even one sentence. Others can evade God's will and avoid being bound and limited; we would rather be restricted by His will and willing to be imprisoned in His hand. All this, because we have already offered ourselves to God and have been laid on the altar. We are already a consecrated people. We should be able to say continually to God, "O God, I have no choice; I have already consecrated myself to Thee: I am in Thy hand." Whenever anything happens to us, we must express ourselves in this way to God. We must remain thus in God's hand and actually be a sacrifice unto God. Only this is the true meaning of consecration.

### **The Purpose of Consecration—To Work for God**

Since the meaning of consecration is to become a sacrifice, the thing offered is something which is entirely for God.

The purpose of consecration, therefore, is to be used by God, to work for God. But in order that we may work *for* God, we must first *let* God work. Only those who have first let God work can work for God. We can only work for God to the extent that we allow God to work. If we do not let God work first, our labor can neither please Him nor be accepted by Him, no matter how diligent and enduring we are. Those things we do for God which are pleasing and acceptable to Him can never go beyond that which we allow God to work. "Let" is the basis, and "for" is the result. When we have the basis of "let," then we can have the result of "for." This is an unchanging principle. Therefore, when we consecrate ourselves to God, although it is to work for God, yet from our standpoint the emphasis is to let God work. The purpose of consecration then is to let God work in order that we might reach the stage of working for God.

**T**he offering of the sacrifices in the Old Testament also sheds light on this matter. When the bullocks and rams were killed and offered to God as burnt-offerings, it was first necessary for God to do His thorough work upon them, that is, to consume them by fire, if they were to be pleasing and acceptable to Him. If the sacrifices were not consumed by fire, they would be raw and foul-smelling and could never be acceptable or pleasing to God. Our consecration today is just like that. We have already offered ourselves, yet if we do not allow God to work first, but go out to work for Him and serve Him directly, that work and that service will be raw, untempered, and foul-smelling. It can never be accepted by God, let alone satisfy Him.

When Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire before God, they were consequently consumed by God (Lev. 10). The offering of strange fire is the principle of working directly for God. Anyone who has not been dealt with by God and worked on by God and yet tries to work for God directly is offering strange fire. It is not only raw, untempered, foul-smelling, and thus unacceptable to God, it is also dangerous and apt to involve one in much difficulty in God's work. This is why we earnestly hope many times on one hand that brothers and sisters would love God and offer themselves to God, but on the other hand we are truly afraid that, when people love God and offer themselves to Him, they will want to work for God directly and serve Him directly. All such work and service is dangerous. I believe that if there are one hundred brothers and sisters in our midst who by the constraining love of the Lord consecrate themselves to Him, desiring to work for Him and yet not allowing Him to work first, these one hundred persons will quarrel every day. One will want to serve God this way, and another will want to serve God another way. The church will inevitably be divided.

One of the main reasons for the confusion in the church

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today is just this. Whenever someone offers himself to God, his purpose is to work for God, but he is either ignorant or neglects to allow God to work first. When people do not love the Lord or consecrate themselves to the Lord, it seems that everything is peaceful; but when there are those who love the Lord and consecrate themselves to Him, wanting to work for God directly, many problems are raised, and there is much confusion. The same principle applies even to the reading of the Bible. If our head has not been worked on by God, if it is still in its natural state, it is dangerous to read the Bible. If we do, in each reading and in each expounding we will allow our fancy to run wild. If a person is not zealous to read the Bible, it is not so bad; but once he acquires this zeal, his reading becomes wild, and he gathers from it many strange and erroneous ideas. His zeal is good, but his untamed reading is indeed fearsome. It is extremely dangerous whenever a man comes into direct touch with spiritual things without experiencing the working of God. If we want to touch spiritual things, whether it be to work for God, to study the Bible, to preach the gospel, or to oversee the church, we must first allow God to work on us that we might be broken, subdued, and disciplined by Him. Then we may touch spiritual things and work for God; then we are safe and no longer dangerous.

We must, therefore, be severe with ourselves and ask whether our consecration to God is for working for God directly or for allowing God to work in us first. If we are not willing to allow God to work in us first, we cannot attain the object of working for God. Consequently, after our consecration we must not first be anxious to accomplish something for the Lord. We need to remain on the altar and allow God to work on us and consume us. The result of this consuming work will enable us to work for the Lord. This consecration, this service, is ripe and resurrected; it is acceptable to God and satisfies Him. In conclusion, the object of consecration is to let God work in us that we may work for Him.

### **The Result of Consecration—to Abandon Our Future**

The result of consecration is that we are caused to cut off all our relationships with people, matters, and things, and especially to abandon our future and wholly belong to God. We need to consider this matter also in the light of the offerings of the Old Testament. When a bullock was taken for sacrifice and offered upon the altar, he was immediately cut off from all his previous relationships. He was severed from his master, his companions, and his corral. After he was consumed by fire, he even lost his original form and stature. All his choicest parts were changed to a sweet-smelling savor to God, and all that was left was a heap of ashes. Everything was cut off, and everything was finished. This was the result of the bullock being offered to God. Since our consecration is also an offering to God, the

result must also be the same. There must be the giving up of everything to be burned to ashes by God to the point where all is finished. If evidence of this relinquishing of all things and burning to ashes is not seen in a man, there is something wrong with his consecration. Some brothers and sisters still have hopes after their consecration of becoming such and such a person. This proves that their future has not been given up.

**T**he future we are speaking about includes not only our future in this world, but also our future in the so-called Christian world. We all know how the world naturally attracts us and offers the hope of a future in it, but even the so-called Christian world holds an attraction to us and offers a hope of a future in it. There are some, for example, who hope to be famous preachers, some to be world-wide evangelists, and some to obtain the degree of doctor of divinity. All these are hopes for the future. Brothers and sisters, if we have been enlightened, we will discover that even in our hope for more fruit in our work, our hope for more people to be saved through our gospel preaching, our hope to lead more brothers and sisters to love the Lord, and our hope for more local churches to be built by our hand—even in these hopes—there are hidden many elements which are for the building up of our future. When we see the prosperity of others, we become envious. When we see the achievement of others, our heart is moved. All this proves that we still have hopes in our own future. All these hopes, however, never exist in a consecrated person. A truly consecrated man is a man who has given up his future. He abandons not only his future in the world, but also his so-called spiritual future. He no longer has hopes for himself in anything; all his hope is in God. He lives purely and simply in the hand of God; he is what God wants him to be and does what God wants him to do. Whatever the outcome may be, he does not know and does not care. He only knows that he is a sacrifice, wholly belonging to God. The altar is forever the place where he stands, and a heap of ashes is forever the result. His future has been utterly abandoned.

This giving up of the future is not a reluctant act after something has already occurred to wreck your future hopes; it is a willing surrender before such an event. It is not waiting till you have lost or failed in your business and then giving up. It is not waiting till you lose your job, till you cannot enter college, or till you fail to obtain a Ph.D. degree, and then give up. It is not this. When we speak of giving up the future, we mean that when a profitable business opportunity awaits you, when an excellent job awaits you, or when a Ph.D. degree awaits you, you willingly give it all up for the Lord's sake. This is truly called the giving up of the future. Even if the entire glory of Egypt is placed before you, you can say to it, "Good-bye, I must go to Canaan." Perhaps Satan will continue to call you from behind, saying, "Do come back. We have a Ph.D. degree here and an Egyptian palace for you. This is

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a rare opportunity.” If at this time you can face him and tell him straightly, “Be gone; these are not my portion,” this then is a true giving up of the future.

**T**here is a very grievous situation today—many who serve the Lord have a future in the Christian world. We must understand that this is a very serious degradation. If this does not prove there was something wrong with the original consecration of the people concerned, it does prove they have fallen off the altar. A truly consecrated person knows from the outset that his future is through. If he still wants to have a future, he need not come to the church. He realizes that he should never have any future, because he is already on the altar. Sometimes he comes to a place of difficulty and finds that he has more courage, because this difficulty proves to him that he is still on the altar and still under God’s guidance. Sometimes he enters a period of ease, and he becomes on the contrary a little fearful, wondering if perhaps he has fallen off the altar and is no more under God’s guidance. Brothers and sisters, we need frequently to ask ourselves: What is the result of our consecration? Has our all become ashes on the altar? Has all our future been abandoned? Or have we reserved something that is hopeful?

Every one of us must go before God and deal thoroughly with this problem of consecration. If our consecration is not sound, sooner or later problems will arise in our service and in our spiritual condition. The temptations of future prospects are very many and very great, and these temptations are particularly severe to those who are especially gifted and can be used outwardly to some extent by God. There are many matters, many environments, and many attractions which can cause us to lose our consecration unconsciously. There is only one way for us to overcome these temptations, and that is to relinquish thoroughly all our future on the very first day of our consecration. This means that since we have consecrated ourselves, everything is through.

From the life of J. N. Darby, we may see what a truly consecrated person he was. He was greatly used of the Lord in the last century, many thousands being helped spiritually through him. Even in his old age he was still walking a straight path with the Lord. He could very well have had fame and position, but he did not take them. At a certain time in his old age he went to work in Italy and spent a night in a very plain and lowly inn. He was exhausted, and he bowed his head between his hands and sang softly: “Jesus, I my cross have taken, all to leave and follow Thee....” Even in this condition he had no murmuring, no regrets; he could joyfully sing this hymn to the Lord. I was really touched when I came to this point in reading his life story. The fact that he could preserve the result of relinquishing his future right to the end

moved me. Although he was old, his consecration was not old; it was still as fresh as it was in the beginning.

Brothers and sisters, this result of abandoning all our future prospects always needs to be kept fresh within us. Never let our consecration become old. If it grows old, it is the same as if we had never consecrated ourselves. We should always be as ashes on the altar, always entirely for God to enjoy, always without any future.

### A Concluding Word

After we have gone through the five main points of consecration, we should be quite clear concerning the lesson of consecration. From the standpoint of the truth, we can say that everything pertaining to the doctrine of consecration is included in these five points. From the standpoint of experience, as long as a person is truly consecrated, he will also have these five points; the only difference we can point out is that some may have experienced these matters in a stronger way, others in a weaker way; some more evidently, others more hiddenly. These five points of consecration, therefore, were not conceived in our imagination to indoctrinate people; rather, the *actual condition* of a consecrated person is our basis for unveiling these points and making them explicit. I do hope that through these explanations and investigations there will be on one hand a development of the consecration that is already in one’s inner being, and on the other hand that the defects or lack of intensity of one’s consecration may be revealed, that by this, one will be enabled to pursue and progress continuously in this experience.

**W**e must realize that it is not possible to hit the climax of any experience of life by experiencing it just once. We need to pursue continuously, so that our experience will increase gradually and become fuller, until it reaches the stage of maturity. Although some brothers and sisters have consecrated themselves, yet they have only had a beginning; they have not had much experience in consecration. They need to pursue continuously and deepen their experience in this matter.

If we want to enter into a house, we usually need to walk a certain distance, after which we step into the door of the house. But in spiritual experience it is just the opposite. You must step inside the door first, and then you begin to walk. All experience of spiritual life requires that we first step inside the door and pass through a crisis to have a beginning; we should then walk another distance and continue to go forward, to pursue, and to experience further. The crisis experience of some people is quite weak and without weight; so they must still continue to pursue. On the other hand, some people have a crisis experience that is strong and weighty. Yet they likewise need to go on continually and pursue a deeper consecration.

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Although all five points of consecration are included in the normal consecration experience of a person at the beginning as though they were already attained, yet this does not mean that his experience of consecration is complete. It has just begun; it is simply an entrance through the door. There is still a long way ahead which he is required to walk in the path of consecration. Consequently we must be steadfast in our consecration in every environment and practice our consecration in every affair, and at every opportunity we must reconsecrate ourselves afresh. By so doing we can go straight forward in the path of consecration.

In Old Testament times the burnt offering had to be offered every day, not only in the morning, but also in the evening. On every Sabbath, at every new moon, and during every festival, special burnt offerings were required (Num. 28). Special burnt offerings were also needed at times of great events (Lev. 8:18, 28; 1 Kings 3:4, 15; 8:62-64). One offering was not sufficient; offerings were required daily, at every festival, and at every event. The burnt offering, therefore, is one of the most important offerings in the Old Testament. Due to this, the brazen altar was even specifically called "the altar of burnt offering." The frequency of these offerings typifies to us the need for making a new consecration every day. When we come to special convocations and special events, we need to make special offerings. If we would consecrate ourselves repeatedly in this way, the experience of consecration would be increased and formed in us.

Many of us have read the biography of Madame Guyon. Through the account of her life we see that she was one who was steadfast in her consecration, and one who advanced continually. Consequently, we can clearly distinguish the five points of consecration expressed in her when she was advanced in years. The basis of her consecration was as firm as a rock. Whenever there was a controversy between her and the Lord, there was a rock under her feet on which she stood continually. She said to the Lord, "Lord, You have bought me!" The motive of her consecration was just like the mighty force of rushing waters: therefore, her consecration remained sweet and absolute. In her autobiography she often mentioned that she renewed her marriage vows to the Lord. This shows that in her inner being she was constantly touched and constrained by the love of the Lord, for a marriage vow is an expression of love at its highest. From the human standpoint, the path she trod was one of much suffering, but to her it was exceedingly sweet; because of the love of the Lord, her suffering was transformed to sweetness. The meaning of her consecration was even clearer. Although she was sometimes at home serving her husband and caring for her child, yet she was one who really remained in the hands of the Lord. She was willing to take her hands off and put herself entirely into the hands of

God. She said to Him, "O God, if You want to use me, to beat me, to press me, or to mold me, I want to be at Your disposal; even if You want to cut me into pieces and kill me, I am at Your disposal. I am not in my own hands; I have handed myself over to You." This particular point is especially clear in Madame Guyon. The purpose of her consecration was not muddled at all. She was really one who through consecration let God work within her, carve her, break her, and press her. Her function, therefore, was expressed in a very full way—it shone as the midday sun. We consider that in the last three centuries she has provided more life to the saints than anyone else. Because she let God work in her the most, she had the most to minister to others. Although she is dead, yet to this very day we obtain help through her. Finally, the result of her consecration causes us to worship God even more. She had no success in the world, nor in her spiritual work were there any future prospects. She could say that she was just a heap of ashes; everything was gone. On the other hand, in the universe, before God she is ever producing a sweet-smelling savor to His satisfaction and to the joy of His people. The experience of consecration with her truly reached its full maturity.

Having gone through all these matters related to consecration, we are enabled to understand that consecration is not just a knowing of the right of ownership in the mind or a feeling of love in our affections, nor is it only an attitude and expression of ours toward God. Actually speaking, consecration itself is a part of life; and for that matter, it is a major part of life. The experience of consecration, therefore, is really the experience of life. The fullness of one's experience of life depends on the fullness of one's experience of consecration. Hence, if one pursues the experience of consecration, it will enable him to grow in life. Furthermore, since consecration is a part of life, then by following this life and living in this life, the law of life will cause the five points of consecration to be clearly and spontaneously worked out in us. When we first consecrate ourselves, our experience is similar to an embryo in the mother's womb—one cannot distinguish the ear, the eye, the mouth, and the nose. As we grow in life, however, these five points related to the experience of consecration gradually become formed in us. Then we really have a feeling that we have been bought by God and that all our rights are in His hand. We become a prisoner of His love because His love has pierced our hearts. We become a sacrifice indeed, laid on the altar for God's enjoyment and satisfaction. We will be those who have been thoroughly worked over by God and are then able to work for Him. Our future will truly be as a handful of ashes. All our ways of escape outside of God's will shall have been cut off; God only will be our future and our way. At that time the experience of our consecration will indeed have become matured. May we all, by the grace of the Lord, pursue and go on together. **LFC**