



A CONSECRATED

LIFE

ROMANS 12:1-2

CHARLES SEET

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Foreword

A Consecrated Life—Romans 12:1-2 is a series of messages delivered by the author to members of Hope Bible-Presbyterian Church, Adelaide, at their Family Bible Camp, 28–31 March 1997.

It has richly blessed both old and young like healing medicine for the ailing heart and tonic to the anaemic soul—the blood of Christ that not only cleanses from all sin but nourishes us to radiant health.

For the benefit of those who seek God’s Kingdom and His righteousness these messages are published for wider circulation. It is our prayer that some earnest seeker will forsake the glitter of this world and consecrate himself or herself to serve our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

*“Only one life ’twill soon be past,
Only what’s done for Jesus will last.”*

Amen.

Timothy Tow
August 1998

Chapter 1

A Consecrated Life

Text: Romans 12:1-2

Consecration can be defined as the devoting or setting apart to the worship or service of God. The idea of consecration is found both in the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament the Israelites were allowed to devote their fields and their cattle, and sometimes the spoils of war, were consecrated to the Lord. According to the law that God gave to Moses, the first-born, both of man and beast, were to be consecrated to God. And later, God commanded that the men from the tribe of Levi were to consecrate themselves for His service at the Tabernacle, in place of the first-born men of Israel. We see a similar thing in the New Testament: All Christians, like the Levites, are also to personally consecrate themselves to the Lord. And according to 1 Peter 2:9, God has made us “*a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people.*”

The passage of Scripture that clearly shows the importance of personal consecration is Romans 12:1–2:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

I. The Mercies of God

At the beginning of this passage we notice a word that links this passage with all the preceding chapters. It is the word, “*therefore.*” This word shows us that what the writer is about to say, finds its basis in what he has already said before this. And he summarises all the things he has already said, under the term, “*the mercies of God.*” That is actually the main theme of the first eleven chapters of the Book of Romans—they are Paul’s great exposition of the mercies of God.

Romans 1–11 describe the wonderful mercies that God has shown to us, in giving us a salvation which is based, not on good works, but on faith in Jesus Christ. This is a salvation which we did not deserve at all, for if God had given us exactly what we deserved, none of us would be saved. This is a salvation which is ours only because of God’s mercy. Out of the goodness of His own heart, God has shown immense kindness to us by giving us a salvation that we do not deserve.

We who are saved now stand tremendously indebted to Him. We actually owe our lives to God since without His mercy, we would all still be dead in sin and destined for eternal death. And if we do not realise how much we owe to God and reciprocate His immense kindness, then we would be the most wretched and ungrateful creatures on the face of this earth.

II. Present Your Bodies

When we have benefited so much from such outstanding mercy and kindness, surely we have to give an appropriate response. And what response does God expect from us? The passage tells us that the only appropriate response is that we should present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God. That is what the Apostle Paul is urging us to do here. He says that you ought to bring your body and make it available to God.

Now perhaps that raises an interesting question. Why, of all things, does God want our bodies? Why would God ever want my body, a body characterised by sin from its fallen human nature, a body that grows old and weak and frail? Would it not be better for us to present our souls to

God rather than our bodies? After all, our souls are immortal but our bodies are not. But here in this verse, it is explicitly stated that it is our mortal bodies that He wants us to present to Him.

We may find the answer to this in Romans 6:13,

Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.

This verse actually expresses the same idea as Romans 12:1. For instance, the original Greek word for “yield” that is used in this verse is actually the same word translated “present” in Romans 12:1. And the members that are mentioned in Romans 6:13 are actually referring to the parts of our body: our brains, our eyes, ears, mouth, hands and feet. So while Romans 12:1 tells us to present our bodies to God, Romans 6:13 tells us to yield all parts of our bodies to God.

By comparing these two verses, we may now understand why God wants our bodies. It is because bodies that are yielded fully to Him become useful instruments which He can use to do His righteous works in this world. A life that is yielded to the Lord becomes a powerful tool in His hands. Good tools and instruments are important for anything we do. With the right instruments, a cook or chef can prepare a good-tasting nutritious meal in a very short time. With the right instruments, a good carpenter can shape and join pieces of wood into useful furniture items. With the right instruments, a skilled engineer can design the sturdiest buildings and bridges. And with a good instrument, a skilled musician can produce beautiful melodies that can move people to tears.

Therefore, when we present or yield our bodies to God, we are really placing them in the hands of the master builder, the master craftsman, the most excellent and skilled performer, who can use them and bring out their fullest potential to produce great and glorious works of righteousness in this world.

Furthermore the Apostle Paul tells us that this offering of bodies as a living sacrifice is “*your reasonable service.*” The word “*service*” in this verse can also be translated as “*worship.*” Most people would tend

to think of worship as something that they do only when they come to church on the Lord's Day. But according to this verse, your service of worship does not just start or end in church. Your worship of God should also extend throughout the whole week, at home, at work or wherever you are. This is because we worship God whenever we let Him use our lives to do His will in any situation, every day and every hour. And this kind of worship is even more precious in the sight of God than the singing of hymns and the offering of material gifts to Him in a church worship service, because He is glorified in much greater measure through using our lives to do His work in the world. He actually receives much more glory when He can change and influence the lives of the people through our surrendered lives.

Dear reader, God wants you to yield your life fully to Him as your reasonable worship. And He can accomplish great things with your life if you will let Him use you. If you use the body that you have, you will probably misuse it or even abuse it, or you will spend much time trying to preserve it, decorate it, and all the other things that people love to do with their bodies.

But God says, "bring Me your body, and I will use it well to bring peace, to give joy, to show My love and grace wherever you are. I can bless the world through your body." Can you think of any good reason then, why you should not yield every part of yourself to Him? There is nothing that I could desire more, than to see my mortal body, and my short existence in this world doing and accomplishing something which has good enduring value both for now and for eternity. And I am sure that you would feel that way too.

III. A Living Sacrifice

As we continue in verse 1, we notice that Paul also describes the manner in which we ought to present our bodies to Him: as a sacrifice. Why is this act of consecration called a sacrifice? Perhaps because of the cost that is involved in it. What we offer to God is a sacrifice only because it costs us something. This was one of the laws regarding Old Testament sacrifices. A person could not offer an animal that did not

belong to him. He has to bear the loss of one from his own flock or herd.

2 Samuel 24 records a sacrifice that King David had to make in order to stop a plague. David came to a man by the name of Araunah to buy his threshing floor. And Araunah was not only willing to sell his land to the king, but also to provide free of charge, all the animals and the wood for him to offer the sacrifice. But King David declined this offer and said to him, *“I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing”* (v 24). The same thing now applies to consecrating one’s life to the Lord. It has to cost us something that is of value to us. That is precisely how it brings honour and glory to God.



In using the word *“sacrifice”* here, the Apostle Paul was using the language of the Old Testament priesthood. We are now portrayed like the priests of Israel standing at the altar in front of the Holy Temple. The animal for the sacrifice is brought to us. But before it can be offered to God, it must first be checked and inspected. Are there any defects? Is it blind in one eye? Is it lame in one leg? Does it have a skin disease? If any of these things are found, it would not be holy and acceptable to God, and must therefore be rejected. Another animal must be chosen.

This shows us the principle that whatever is to be offered to God should be that which is most valuable to us. It should be the very best we can offer, and not the leftovers or the things that we want to get rid of. Giving to God is not at all like giving to a charity organisation, to which we donate our old clothes, old toys, discarded items, and surplus funds. How can we present our lives to God as if we feel pity for His cause, and would like to help Him out a bit with whatever we can afford to give? No! That would be a tremendous insult to God.

The attitude we should have when we consecrate our lives to God is that we have resolved to reserve the very best portions for Him. We must desire to give the very best of our time and talents, and the most devoted efforts we can give. We must be willing to give our utmost energies in His work, to strain every nerve and muscle, and to go to the very limits of all our resources to please Him. Only that kind of sacrifice would be considered to be worthy of Him, a holy and acceptable sacrifice to Him.

Now, perhaps there is also another reason why consecration is called a sacrifice: in order to bring out the irrevocable nature of this gift. It cannot be taken back. Once an animal was consecrated to God on the altar at the Temple, the one who offered it cannot say, "I change my mind. I want my offering back." Therefore, in consecration, the life that is given to the Lord must be given irrevocably. There must be no provision at all for backing out of it. There was once a prince from India who consecrated his life to the Lord. And the words of his consecration have become immortalised in a well-known hymn. He wrote: "I have decided to follow Jesus: no turning back, no turning back."

And so when we now read Romans 12:1, we understand that, in response to the wonderful mercies that God has shown to us, He wants us to sacrifice the best of our life for him, not minding how costly it is for us, and with no thought of taking it back. Now, we also notice that our sacrifice is qualified in this verse as a "*living sacrifice*," not a dead sacrifice. This is in direct contrast to the Old Testament sacrifices where all the sacrifices offered were dead. The animal was killed by the shedding of blood before it was cut up and placed on the altar. Then, if the sacrifice was a burnt offering, the whole animal would be burnt up until nothing but ashes were left.

But our sacrifice is not to be like that. We do not please God at all by having ourselves killed and burnt up on an altar. Some pagan cultures like the Aztecs and Mayans in Central America tried to do that. But what they did was utterly hateful to God. Ours is to be a living sacrifice, and this means that we remain alive, and consecrate all the remaining days of our lives to be used exclusively by God from now on. It means giving Him the absolute authority to run and direct our lives

from now on. It means living only to carry out His will and fulfil His objectives from now on. It means saying, “This life is no longer mine, but God’s, and with this life, He can now live in this world through me, to do as He pleases.”

Now, when a person consecrates his life to the Lord like this, it does not mean that he now makes himself totally inactive and inert so that God can come and completely take over all his faculties. It does not mean that the person no longer does anything or has any control over what he is doing, speaking and thinking. If that was the case, then there would not be a need at all for the next verse, Romans 12:2: “*And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*”

IV. A Transformed Life

This verse tells us that consecrating one’s life to God means that one must now consciously do two things all the time: The first thing is stated in the negative—to stop being conformed to this world, and the second thing is stated in a positive manner—to keep on being transformed by the renewing of the mind.

Let us consider the first of these two: What does the Word of God mean when it tells us to stop being conformed to this world? There have been some in past ages who have unfortunately misunderstood this. They thought that this verse means that one must not have anything to do with the world at all, and must live as ascetics. And so they withdrew themselves from society and deliberately denied themselves every pleasure they could think of, believing that this would make them more spiritual than others.

But this is wrong and God’s Word clearly condemns it in Colossians 2:20–23,

Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines

of men? Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.

Even today, do not be surprised that there are still some people who will judge you and say things like, “If you want to be really spiritual, then you must stop eating meat, and never drink coffee or tea again; you must sell off your television and your computer, you must never celebrate Christmas and Easter because they have pagan origins; you must not own any property or have any bank accounts.” The list of forbidden things and activities goes on and on.



But these are not at all the kind of things that are meant by the words “*be not conformed to this world.*” What these words mean is that we should not be following the worldly trends and patterns of this age, the worldly philosophy of life that surrounds us on every side. And the worldly philosophy of life is based on one main purpose: the advancement of self. You will often hear people say, when faced with something new, “What’s in it for me?” You will often see people trying to get ahead of others, grabbing things before

someone else gets them, hanging on to everything they have got no matter what it costs in terms of hurt or pain to someone else.

In Singapore, it has become a publicly acknowledged fact that to Singaporeans, life means obtaining the 5 C’s which are: “Car,” “Condominium,” “Cash,” “Credit card” and “Country Club membership.”

In a society that has values like these, you will always feel under pressure to conform. But consecration means resisting that urge to conform to them, even if it means that you might be embarrassed before your friends and colleagues who do not know Christ. And because we

are afraid of embarrassment, and of being ridiculed and looked down upon by others, it sometimes becomes very difficult not to conform. But this is what we must do, if we are consecrated to the Lord.

Instead of being conformed to the world, we must be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Verse 2 says, “*And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*” In fact there is no way that you can keep yourself from being conformed to the world unless you are being transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Something has to change in your thinking. You need a mind that can see through all these silly schemes of the world. The Scriptures call this “*the mind of Christ*” (1 Cor 2:16). The mind of Christ is the way of looking at life as Jesus does, seeing life as He sees it. It is seeing what really is there and not what just seems to be there, seeing what really is important, not what looks to be important. The mind of Christ does not see the advancement of self as being the basis of life, but the advancement of God’s will. And, as the end of verse 2 says, this is “*that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*”

We can now summarise what we have learnt from our study of Romans 12:1–2, that, in glad response to the wonderful mercies we have received from God, we should now irrevocably consecrate our lives to Him. And this means that we must stop following the worldly self-advancing trends around us, and, live only for the advancement of God’s will.

The question that you must think carefully about now is: Will you do what the Word of God says and consecrate your life to God? “What are you going to do with your life?”

This same question was in the thoughts of a 27 year-old man on a ship as he sailed back to his homeland of China. His heart was very burdened by this question and he was reaching the point of making the most important and irrevocable decision of his life. He had spent the past six years of his life in America, working and studying. He had earned many prestigious degrees, even graduating from Ohio State

University with a doctorate in Chemistry. And now as the ship sailed home, Dr John Sung cast his diplomas into the sea, having decided that he would no longer be conformed to the world, but consecrate his life to God.



Within an incredibly short time, his consecrated life was used by God to set fires of revival not only in China, but also in Taiwan, Malaysia, in Singapore, Philippines and Indonesia, bringing several hundred thousand lives to the Lord. And wherever he preached, the stocks of Bibles in local bookstores would be sold out in a short time. All of this was accomplished in just 15 years of fully consecrated, unreserved, unrelenting service. Dr John Sung burned himself out for the Lord as a living sacrifice and died at the age of 43 from cancer and tuberculosis.

Although Dr Sung has been gone now for over 50 years, the impact of his consecrated life is still being felt today, in China, Southeast Asia and beyond. Hundreds of new churches, mission stations, Bible colleges and seminaries have been built and established. The Bible-Presbyterian (B-P) church movement was born in the John Sung Revival in Singapore in August 1935. This was a revival in which over 2,000 souls were saved, over 100 preaching bands were organised, and over 100 young people consecrated themselves to full-time service. And among those who consecrated themselves were two brothers, Dr Timothy Tow and Dr Tow Siang Hwa, the founding fathers of the B-P movement.

Truly we must be greatly amazed that out of just one consecrated life, the life of John Sung, God was able to accomplish such great and mighty, wonderful things. And God can still do the same thing through a life that is consecrated to Him today. Will that life be yours?

Chapter 2

The Motivation for Consecration: The Mercies of God

Text: John 19:17-42

*“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God . . .”
(Rom 12:1).*

The most important consecrated life of all was that of our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ. No other life was ever more consecrated to God than the Life of Jesus. According to John 6:38, Jesus came down from Heaven, not to do His own will, but the will of the Father who sent Him. In John 4:34, Jesus said, *“My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.”*

And even though the will of the Father led Him into the awful experience of suffering and dying for our sins on the cross, He did not shrink from it, but fully submitted Himself to it. We remember how Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane when His soul was exceedingly sorrowful, *“O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt”* (Matt 26:39).

Through doing the Father’s will, our wonderful Saviour revealed, in the most dramatic and wonderful way ever possible, the full dimensions of the mercies of God. The death of Christ displayed God’s infinite mercy for sinners like you and me. How wondrously merciful God is to us, to make His own dearly beloved Son bear the full force of His awful wrath against our sins on the cross. If God had been any less merciful to

us than He was, surely He would have spared His only begotten Son the infinite pain and anguish of dying the excruciating death on the cross.

I trust that as we take a close look at the events that led up to our Lord's death, we may gain a deeper appreciation of the mercies of God that Jesus revealed on the cross. And by appreciating the mercies of God, I trust that you may be deeply moved to "*present your body a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*"

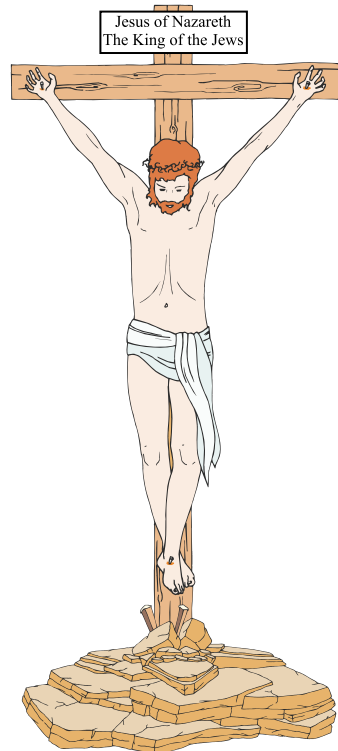
There are three wonderful things in the death of Jesus that must move you to consecrate your life to Him: The Shame of His Humiliation, The Greatness of His Love, and The Fulfillment of His Word.

I. The Shame of His Humiliation

The scene of the crucifixion begins in verse 17,

And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha: Where they crucified him, and two other with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst. And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS.

There is a very interesting but meaningful irony here. The title that was written on the placard attached to the cross above Jesus described Him as "*The King of the Jews*" and yet there He was, most unlike any king, not seated on a throne of glory, not dressed in royal robes, not being honoured and respected by crowds of



people, but being mocked, insulted by men, shamefully exposed, and nailed to a cross like a dangerous criminal. According to historical records, crucifixion was the most cruel and diabolical form of death ever invented.

And it was not at all like the crucifixion rituals that are still being carried out in the Philippines every year on Good Friday. If you were to visit a place called Pampanga on Good Friday, you would see crowds of people gathered around devotees who have themselves crucified in the mistaken belief that this will make penance for their own sins. And these devotees will have themselves whipped and will carry their crosses to a certain spot and there be nailed to them. They will even wear a crown of thorns on their heads.

But the nails they use are clean steel nails that have been soaked in alcohol for a whole year. They do not really hang from the cross, because there is a little platform attached to the cross at their feet for them to stand on. There are doctors around to help in case anything serious happened to them. And the most important thing is that after going through all that they are taken down from the crosses, alive and well. Some of them may even do the same thing again the following year.

The crucifixion that our Lord went through was not like that. The victim was suspended from the cross by iron spikes in the most unnatural and uncomfortable position. He suffered intense pain, discomfort, a growing thirst, chills, and found it very hard to breathe, and died a very slow agonising death. Our Lord Jesus was enduring all of that at Calvary. How could this pitiful figure hanging on the cross be called a king? Is this the way that a king is treated?

In verses 23 and 24, we read that the insults against Jesus did not stop there. They also treated His clothing with the same contempt.

Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture

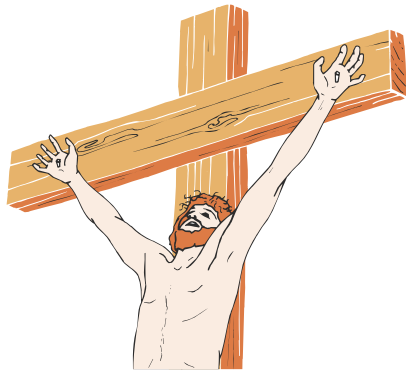
might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots.

Here we see the soldiers tearing up and gambling for the only personal possessions He had left in this world. How can anyone treat the possessions of a king in such a terrible way?

Let us try our best to imagine this scene as vividly as our minds can imagine, based on our passage in the Gospel of John. And to make the scene even more vivid, let us also add what the other Gospel writers describe about this same event. According to Matthew 27:39–44,

And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.

According to the Gospel of Luke, even the soldiers joined in to mock Him, saying, *“If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself”* (23:37). There seemed to be no one who did not have an unkind word to hurl at Him as He hung helplessly on the cross. The whole world was represented at the cross reviling and crucifying the Lord. But all of these verbal abuses that Jesus endured for six hours was nothing compared to the extreme anguish He experienced of being abandoned by the One who was dearest to Him: God the Father Himself. Both Matthew and Mark record that after those six hours when His sufferings reached the highest point and became most unbearable, Jesus shouted from the



cross, “*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?*” which means, “*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*” With all men against Him, and the Father forsaking Him, who else was there for Jesus to turn to? No one at all! He was truly despised, rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, esteemed as one smitten of God and afflicted.

You might remember some moments in your life when you felt embarrassed or humiliated in some way. You probably did not like them at all. They are painful even to think about them. But let me tell you this: nothing you have endured can ever be compared with the shame and humiliation that Christ endured on the Cross. How would you have reacted if you endured what Jesus endured? I think you would probably have felt very bitter and upset and all your thoughts would have been focused only on your own pitiful condition. You would say, “Oh, woe is me! How painful and helpless I am!” Who can be bothered about thinking or being concerned about the needs of others at a moment like that, when he himself is in great need of help? And yet as we come to the next part of John 19 we see Jesus doing just that: This shows us the second wonderful thing in His death, which is:

II. The Greatness of His Love

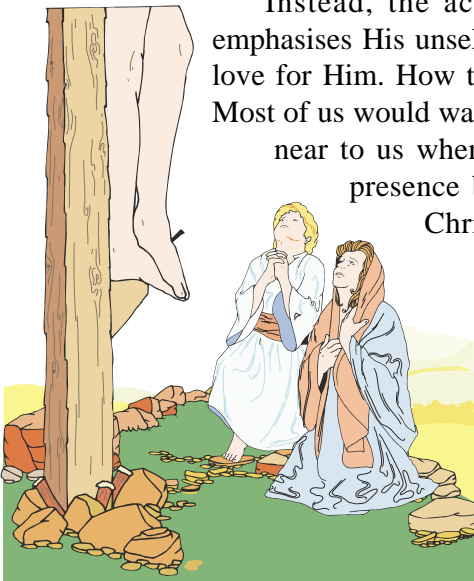
Let us look at verses 25–27 of John 19,

Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.

Now here is a really marvellously wonderful and touching scene. As Jesus hung from the cross and saw His weeping mother there, He felt tremendous love for her. She was very deeply grieved. He wanted her to be comforted, and cared for. But being unable to do these things now as a filial son, He asked His nearest disciple, John, to do so. None of the brothers and sisters of Jesus seemed to have been there at the cross, so Jesus could only entrust her to John. Some believe that John

was actually a cousin of Jesus and this would make it quite natural for Jesus to ask him to care for His mother. He wanted John to take her to his home, so that she would not have to bear the anguish of seeing her son suffer and die like this. And John did.

This is quite different from the scene at the cross portrayed by the Catholic Church, that shows Jesus lying dead in the arms of His mother who looks down lovingly at Him. This scene is known as the *Pieta*. But none of the Gospel records indicate that Mary the mother of Jesus was still at the cross when Jesus gave up the ghost and was taken down from the cross.



Instead, the account given in John's gospel emphasises His unselfish love for her, rather than her love for Him. How thoughtful and unselfish He was. Most of us would want our closest relatives to be very near to us when we are in deep distress. Their presence brings some comfort to us. But Christ was willing even to give up this kind of comfort, because of His tender concern that His mother should not be overly distressed.

This is not the only way He showed His love. From Luke's account we learn that Jesus also had great compassion on the dying thief that was crucified beside Him.

In Luke 23:42, when the thief said unto Jesus, "*Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.*" Jesus replied, "*Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.*" How encouraging these words must have been to the dying thief, even though they were uttered by one who desperately needed encouragement Himself.

But that is not all. It may be easier for a person to feel love and compassion for those who are feeling distressed *for* you or feeling distressed *with* you, like the mother of Jesus and the dying thief. But

how can it ever be possible to feel love and compassion for those who *hate* you, for enemies that are cruel, for those who take delight in causing you your greatest distress? This is the point where Christ's love is shown to be far greater than any human love. On the cross, He loved not only His own mother, His disciples and the dying thief. He even loved those who were crucifying Him and who still continued to revile and mock Him.

According to Luke 23:34, Jesus said, "*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.*" Jesus, our great Lord, showed His love even to those who truly did not deserve to be loved by Him. We observe that all the while He was on the cross, He did not utter a single unkind word against them. He did not harbour any ill feeling or desire for revenge against them. What amazing love it must take to be able to do this. This world had never known such love before, until Christ died on the cross and showed it.

Is our own love like that? No. We would find it most difficult to ever love like that without God's help. But when such wondrous love is shown it should never fail to melt the hearts of those who receive it. Do you know that we have received such love? God's Word tells us that when Jesus died on the cross, He did it because He loves sinners like you and me. Did we deserve that love? No. By our sins, we had offended and insulted Him just as much as those who nailed Him to the cross. He could have left us as we were, destined for the eternal death we deserved, for having done these things against Him. And yet it was His marvellous love for us that made Him bear the judgement for our sins on the Cross, to die in our place, so that we may be saved. Romans 5:7–8 tells us,

For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

When Jesus lovingly prayed on the cross to forgive those who were crucifying Him, His prayer was heard and answered, because it was His own death that made that forgiveness possible. That death which took place on the cross was not a setback or an accident, it was not an

unexpected turn of events in God's plan. His death was actually planned from the very beginning of time, long before this world even existed. And this is why we can find it foretold in the Bible centuries before it even took place. It was foretold in passages like Isaiah 53, Psalm 22, Zechariah 12 and Daniel 9.

In fact, the Bible foretold almost every detail of Christ's death. Everything that happened at Calvary amazingly fulfilled all that Scripture had predicted even to the very smallest detail, even to things like the amount of money that Judas would be paid for betraying Him. This brings us to the third wonderful thing we can see in Christ's death:

III. The Fulfilment of His Word

Let us first look again at verse 24,

They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots.

Even this small detail was a fulfilment of God's plan. And what is more amazing is that the Roman soldiers who did these things did not have the slightest inkling that even what they did had been foretold in Scripture. The passage of Scripture which had foretold this is Psalm 22:18, "*They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture,*" which was written by King David about 1,000 years earlier.

This is only the first of three times in this passage of John's Gospel where the fulfilment of God's Word by the events surrounding Christ's death is emphasised. Look at verses 28–29,

After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth.

It was Matthew who provides the additional detail that the vinegar they gave Christ also had a horrible tasting substance called gall mixed into it. Why was gall mixed in it? It was not to help Him, as some have

suggested. It was done by the Roman soldiers for their own amusement. It was intended by them to provoke their victim, to add more insult to His injury. It was almost like a practical joke that some people like to play. They seemed to take delight in making Jesus suffer, and so when He asked for a drink, someone at that moment came up with the idea of adding something to make the cheap sour wine they offered Him taste unpleasantly bitter. But even this little act of mischief had been known and revealed in the Scriptures long before time. The passage of Scripture which had foretold this is Psalm 69:21, *“They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink,”* which was also written by King David.

Verses 36–37 continue, *“For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced.”* The prophecies were found in another Davidic Psalm, 34:20, *“He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken,”* and in Zechariah 12:10,

And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.

These verses bring out something that was quite unusual about Christ’s crucifixion. It was usually the custom of the Roman executioners to speed up the death of their victims on the cross by smashing the legs with a blow from the shaft of a spear. This is why verse 32 specifically mentions that the soldiers broke the legs of the two thieves beside Jesus. But before they could do the same thing to Jesus, they noticed that He was already dead, and so they did not do this.

But just at this time, one of them, perhaps feeling bored and in a playful mood, thoughtlessly speared Him at His side, for target practice. And when he did that, he was not at all aware that even that little thoughtless act of his, had been foretold about 500 years earlier by the

prophet Zechariah with the words, “*they shall look upon me whom they have pierced*” (12:10).

Now what is the whole point of knowing that Christ’s death and even the small unusual details of how He would die had been prophesied long before He was crucified? Why do the gospel writers stress so much that these prophecies were fulfilled? I believe that these wonderful fulfillments recorded here are meant to bring out the great significance of this whole event. This death was not like any other death. It was a very special death that brought about the death of death itself. It was a death that removed the power of death over us. Through that one death that Jesus died on the cross, He conquered death once and for all time. And with the words “*It is finished!*” (John 19:30), He declared that He had given the final death blow to death itself. In three days Christ emerged from the grave alive and well. Death had no power over Him.

Now we come to the most important part. It is not enough for us to just gaze and wonder at these amazing things revealed in our Lord’s death on the cross. It is not enough just to explore how shameful His humiliation was, How Great His selfless compassionate love was, and how detailed the fulfilment of His Word was. These things must lead us into a proper response.

How should we respond to these three things?

I would like to suggest that our response to these things should be along the same lines as the response of two people in our text who were very deeply touched by what they had seen. So touched were they, that they did something quite extraordinary for Jesus after He died. One of them was Joseph of Arimathea—the secret disciple mentioned in verse 38. According to the other gospel accounts, Joseph was a rich man and a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin council, who had objected to the council’s decision to condemn Jesus. He had been afraid all this time to openly confess his faith in Christ until this moment, when he no longer wanted to remain a secret disciple of Christ. He had been moved in his heart very deeply when he saw how Jesus died, and this gave him the boldness to openly confess Christ by going to the Roman governor for

permission to give Jesus a proper burial. Joseph was even willing to sacrifice his own new garden tomb, which he had probably constructed for himself and his family.

What about Nicodemus? Verse 39 tells us that he too was moved to come out in public and risk being criticised by his fellow Pharisees in order to prepare the body for burial. Verse 39 also tells us that Nicodemus purchased one hundred pounds of embalming spices. This is about 30 kilograms and would have been very, very costly. They would have been spread between the layers of grave clothes that they brought with them to wrap up the body of Christ.

And you know, if not for what Joseph and Nicodemus did, the dead body of Jesus would probably have been disposed in a common grave for criminals without being wrapped in cloth and spices. Then when He was resurrected from the dead, there would be no empty grave to prove that He had really resurrected. The authorities would have been able to disprove the resurrection very easily. They would be able to take one of the bodies from that common grave that looked like Jesus and claim that He was still dead.

But by placing the body of Jesus in a new tomb all by itself, Joseph and Nicodemus had unknowingly made it impossible for the Jewish authorities to disprove His resurrection later on. The empty tomb would be there for everyone to see, plus the grave-clothes they had wrapped His body in, which still remained intact and unwound. Such hard evidence has served well to silence any unbelieving theory or explanation made by men to deny the resurrection of Christ later on.

But above all these interesting details, what we want to note at present is that Joseph and Nicodemus responded in the appropriate way that any follower of Christ should, and we must learn from them. They gave their all, they gave their best. They did not regard any cost as being too great to bear to honour Christ as their Lord. They even sacrificed the good reputation they enjoyed in the Sanhedrin council, and were probably expelled from it after what they did for Jesus. They refused to be conformed to the world they lived in and so they were rejected by it. And they therefore exemplify for us the consecration that Romans 12:1–2 tells us about.

Like Joseph and Nicodemus, we should respond to the glorious mercies of God by giving our all, and our best to Jesus. Like them, we should not regard any price as being too high or too costly to pay for our commitment to Christ. And like them, we should refuse to be conformed to the world we now live in, even if it means that the world will reject us for it.

Dear reader, is your heart moved by what you have just read? As you stand at the foot of the cross, beholding the shame of the humiliation that Jesus went through for you, the greatness of the love that He has for you, and the fulfilment of God's Word that prophesied how He would save you by His death, are you not deeply moved by all that? What are you going to do then, with your life?

This same question was in the mind of a rich young German nobleman, as he gazed at a painting of Christ on the cross. That painting showed the face of Jesus in agony with drops of blood and tears streaming down His cheeks. As that rich young nobleman continued to contemplate this painting his eyes looked at the little label that was attached to the bottom of the painting. On it were the words, "All this, I have done for thee. What has thou done for Me?" And as he read these words that young nobleman broke down and cried. And right there he consecrated his life to the Lord, devoting all his time and treasures to the cause of Christ.



And God used the consecrated life of Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf to build up the famous Moravian missionary enterprise, which sent out hundreds of missionaries in the eighteenth century—and inspired countless others. The self-sacrifice, love, and total commitment to evangelisation of the Moravian missionaries are unparalleled in the history of missions. They also influenced the Evangelical Revival in England through James Hutton and John Wesley.

Truly we must be greatly amazed that with just one consecrated life, the life of Count von Zinzendorf, God was able to accomplish such great and mighty, wonderful things. And his consecration was really his response to the mercies of God which he beheld in a picture of Christ crucified. What will your response be? The hymnwriter Isaac Watts expressed this response very well when he wrote the hymn, “When I survey the wondrous cross.”

*When I survey the wondrous cross,
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.*

*Forbid it Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God;
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.*

*See, from His head, His hands His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?*

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all!*

Chapter 3

The Demands of Consecration: A Yielded Life

Text: Acts 8:1-6, 26-40

“ . . . that ye present your bodies . . . ” (Rom 12:1).

In the last chapter, we considered the mercies of God and how that should motivate us to consecrate our lives to the Lord. In this chapter, we want to consider the Demands of Consecration. And we will see that consecration demands from us a constant yielding of our lives to God. Now what exactly is a Yielded Life?

It is not merely a life that constantly refrains from sin, or from doing anything against God. Neither is it just a life that finds help from God to cope with all the needs and trials of life. A yielded life includes these, and yet it is more than these. It is a life that also seeks to please God and do His will in any situation that it finds itself in, whether things are going well or not. It is a life that is filled with a pioneering spirit, it is always busy looking out for new ways and opportunities to glorify God, to promote His kingdom, to influence others to turn to Him, and to strengthen those who already belong to Him. A yielded life finds its greatest joy only when it is being fully utilised by God, and bearing much fruit for Him.

In order for us to really understand and appreciate what a yielded life is, we will study the eighth chapter of Acts. This chapter begins, *“And Saul was consenting unto his death.”* The person who died here

was a church leader named Stephen. In the previous chapter, Stephen had been arrested on false charges of blasphemy and when brought to trial, he had given a very powerful defence of the Christian faith, but the Jews stoned him to death. Stephen had to die for the sake of preaching Christ, but despite his suffering, he received strength to die glorifying God, and forgiving those who were killing him.

But the death of Stephen was a great loss to the church, since he was one of the most able leaders and was also a very powerful teacher of the Old Testament. His death would have caused the church to realise how vulnerable and weak they were in the midst of a nation that was persecuting them.

And this realisation must have become even more acute as the persecution got worse after Stephen's death, for "*at that time there was a great persecution against the church*" (8:1).

For the very first time, the church now began to suffer the full intensity of Jewish hatred against Christ. Christians became regarded as outcasts, outlaws, criminals that were hunted down like rats and thrown into jail. Verse 3 mentions that men and women who professed Christ were removed from their houses and then imprisoned. Many of them fled from Jerusalem as refugees, following the instruction that Christ had given in Matthew 24.

But this moment, when the church seemed to be at its most helpless and weakest situation, also became its strongest and most glorious moment. Instead of being destroyed by the great persecution, we see the church growing even faster, extending her witness much further than before. If the church is likened to a fire that the Jews were trying hard to extinguish, it seems that the persecution that they applied to extinguish it surprisingly became fuel that caused the flames to burn even brighter and the fire to spread more and more, out of control. Look at Acts 8:4, "*Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.*" And as the persecuted believers continued to witness for Christ new churches sprang up. Acts 11:19–21,

Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution
[*the same ones mentioned in 8:1*] that arose about Stephen
travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch,

preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.

Notice one important point: The ones who were preaching the gospel were not missionaries at all, nor a special group of gifted evangelists. In fact in 8:1, we are even told specifically that the Apostles stayed behind at Jerusalem, and they were the ones who had been entrusted with the ministry of preaching the Word. But who were the ones now actually bringing the gospel beyond Jerusalem? They were the members of the church. They were actually ordinary believers who simply made good use of every opportunity they came across, as they migrated to new places and met new people.

It amazes us that they were able to do this even though they themselves were not going through an easy time. They were in the process of relocating their homes and families in new and unfamiliar places.

If you have moved house before, you might understand a little of the anxiety and difficulty this involves. But despite all of this, they still bothered to witness to their neighbours and the friends they made in their new places of residence. Thus new churches started to develop.

How were they able to do this? I would like to suggest that this was possible because of the way that each believer regarded his or her life. Even the most extreme circumstances could not dampen their spirits and their influence, because each of them was living a life that was fully yielded to God. They understood that God was the one leading them from place to place. And so they continued to keep themselves busy in the Lord's work, refusing to let life's circumstances affect their work for the Lord.

This is what we will see now as we spend the rest of our time studying what one particular believer by the name of Philip did. From him, we will learn that there are at least three ways in which we would be busy for the Lord, if our lives are fully yielded to Him.

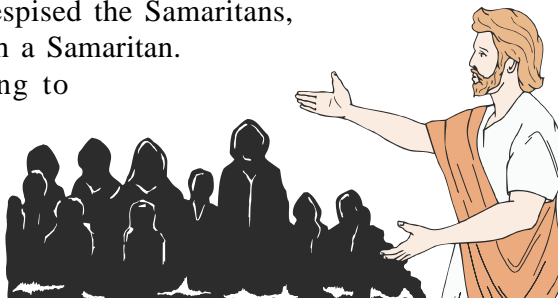
I. Busy in Doing Whatever the Lord Directs

As we read the account of Philip the evangelist, the very first thing we notice is that he left Jerusalem with the other believers, to escape the great persecution that had started there, and then went to the city of Samaria. Acts 8:1, 4, 5,

And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. . . . Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.

And perhaps one reason why he chose to go there, rather than somewhere else, was that he knew for a fact, that the unbelieving Jews from Jerusalem would never come to hunt for him in Samaria, because they despised the Samaritans, and would not even touch a Samaritan.

Philip's purpose in going to Samaria may have been a purely practical one: to find a safe refuge there until the time of persecution against Christians was over.



Samaria was a region north of Judea, and was occupied by a group of people who were of mixed origins. Their ancestors included Israelites as well as Gentiles, and they had a religion which was very similar to the Jews, being based on the Law of Moses, but believing that the proper place for worship was at Mount Gerizim in Samaria, rather than in Jerusalem. Because of these differences, the Jews often looked down upon them as outcasts and refused to have anything to do with them. We remember how Jesus told the parable about the Good Samaritan, to illustrate how we should show love regardless of racial or cultural differences (Luke 10:30–37). We also note that Jesus Himself crossed the cultural barrier when He brought salvation to the Samaritan woman

at the well (John 4). And now it was Philip who happened to be in Samaria and who made use of his time there to tell the Samaritans about Christ.

And the Lord gave Philip a very fruitful ministry while he was there, opening the hearts of the Samaritans, so that many of them were saved. The results were so great that news of it reached the church in Jerusalem, which then sent Peter and John as representatives to confirm the new believers and also to help out with the harvest (Acts 8:14–15). After that it appears that more and more doors kept on opening in Samaria.

Now, as we see the end result, we must not forget that all this would never have happened without the first initiative taken by Philip: just one man whose life was yielded to God, one man who, due to circumstances beyond his own control, had to escape from persecution in Jerusalem, to Samaria, but while he was there, he kept himself busy doing whatever the Lord directed him to do. Clearly it was the Lord then who had brought him there.

This now becomes an example to us. In life, we sometimes find ourselves in new places of residence or work, because of changing circumstances. It may be that we were looking for a job, and the only one suitable is in a place far away, so we have to uproot ourselves and our family, and transfer to a new location. In the midst of getting used to the new place we find ourselves in, there is one thing that we need to do: to remember that ultimately it is God who has placed us there. The next step is to find out how the Lord want to use us while we are there. There must be some purpose, some task to fulfil, in God’s overall plan for this world, that we should consciously seek to do while we are there. And when our task is accomplished, the Lord may then change our circumstances again to redirect our paths to a different place to fulfil another task.

We should therefore be sensitive to His will, asking Him, “Lord, what do You want me to do in this place?” Our wills ought to be always in step with His, so that we will not miss His directions to us. Turning back to the story of Philip, we notice that he was sensitive to the directions he received from God. In verse 26, we read, “*the angel of the*

Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.” The next verse tells us that he promptly arose and went, not asking for reasons why he was to go. But simply trusting that God knows what He is doing. This journey all the way from north to south finally led to his opportunity to witness to an Ethiopian minister of finance who happened to be travelling back to Ethiopia from Jerusalem.

Notice that in verse 29, Philip is again directed by the Holy Spirit to go near and join himself to the Ethiopian’s chariot. When Philip had succeeded in leading him to Christ, the Spirit transported him to yet another series of places for another task. This is what verses 39–40 say,

And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.

Then it appears that Philip settled down with his family at Caesarea and raised up his four daughters there in the fear of the Lord, who grew up to become Bible teachers. This seems to be the situation, according to Acts chapter 21, which records events happening about 20 years later. Philip’s house at Caesarea became a useful lodging place for missionaries like Paul (v 8) and for travelling preachers. Our lives should be yielded, like the life of Philip, constantly busy seeking the Lord’s will, going where He wants us to go, and doing what He wants us to do.

II. Busy in Preaching the Word of God

From the account of Philip, we notice that there was always a readiness on his part to impart the Word of God. He seems to be prepared to share his faith at any time. Now, this is something that all believers are expected to be able to do, when the opportunity arises.

In 1 Peter 3:15, we are commanded to “*be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.*” I think that the problem with many of us is

that when it comes to the subject of sharing our faith, we become afraid, because we do not know how to proceed in giving an accurate, easily understood message that will lead men to Christ. What should we say first? How do we handle the difficult questions that the person will ask, and so on.

To overcome this fear we should try to acquire some training and even practice in sharing our faith with others. But aside from just learning the skills of sharing the gospel, we also need to develop a sense of excitement about the message we are sharing. It is the good news of salvation! People everywhere need to know it. We should never grow weary or tired of declaring this good news.

Looking at Philip, we notice that he never seemed to get tired of preaching the same glorious life-saving message of the Lord Jesus Christ, to tell again and again the wondrous story of how Christ has redeemed sinners. In verse 5, we find Philip preaching Christ to the Samaritans. He seemed to have been asked to speak at a group meeting and was not afraid to use the opportunity to present the gospel message to them. In verse 35, we find Philip doing personal evangelism. Here he was, out in the desert, alone with an Ethiopian official who happened to be reading the Old Testament. Philip was always ready to witness, whether it was to many people or just to one person.

Sometimes in our conversations with our non-Christian friends and loved ones, we find it difficult to bring up the subject of Christ. The things we usually talk about are our work, the weather, the problems of day to day life, or about people we know. How do we change from talking about these things to talking about spiritual things? It is not easy, and it takes some effort. We need to find a transition point, which will help to steer the course of the conversation in the direction of salvation. This transition point can take the form of a question.

This was precisely what Philip used when he approached the Ethiopian official. As Philip came near to the chariot, he may have been wondering: “How am I going to introduce the subject of the gospel to this person. I am a total stranger to him, and he does not know me. I can’t just come out of nowhere and say to him, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.’?”

As Philip came nearer the carriage he heard the voice of someone reading aloud, and he realised that the official was reading aloud from a copy of the Old Testament. And immediately he knew how he should begin his conversation. Not by saying, “It’s a fine day isn’t it?” or “Where might you be going, sir?” His question was designed to lead to the gospel. He asked: “*Understandest thou what thou readest?*” (v 30). And immediately he got the response that he knew he would get: “*How can I, except some man should guide me?*” So Philip sensed the need and then offered to guide the official. This then became his golden opportunity to use the Scriptures to share Christ.

I believe that in the course of our daily interaction with people even in our workplace, the Lord will open doors for us to make a lasting impression for Him on the people we meet. But we on our part have to look for them. We have to think of ways we can introduce the subject without unnecessarily offending the person, but cultivating interest and curiosity in him, so that he will want to learn more about God and how he may be saved. Another example of introducing the subject is given by our Saviour Himself in John 4, when he met the woman at the well. You may recall that although Christ was tired and thirsty, he managed to turn a simple request for a drink of water into an opportunity to save a soul from sin.

III. Busy Winning Souls to Christ

This was the ultimate objective of Philip’s preaching: it was designed to bring forth a response of faith. And in both instances in this chapter, when Philip preached, he reached his desired objective. The Lord had prepared the hearts of the Samaritans (vv 6–8) as well as that of the Ethiopian official (vv 36–38), so that they responded quite voluntarily, spontaneously, without being forced, to commit their lives to Christ. That is the way that souls are won to Christ. Not by making long emotional invitations, or making attractive offers and promises of blessings of health and wealth, as some preachers today are doing, but simply preaching salvation from sin through Christ, and leaving the results to God.

Now, we should not get the idea from this passage that when we share the gospel, we will always get the same response: that people will be ready and willing to receive Christ. But this is not the case. The Apostle Paul was stoned when he preached at Lystra, and when he went to Athens, he was ridiculed by the Athenians for mentioning the resurrection from the dead. So when we attempt to bring men and women to Christ, we need not be disappointed, when they are not won to Christ in the end. We should not put the blame on ourselves.

Our responsibility is to be busy sowing the seed. The rest is left to God. He will cause it to germinate and grow. Sometimes the seed will live and grow, and sometimes it will not. Christ mentioned this in His parable of the sower. Sometimes the seed takes a longer time than expected to germinate. Many people hear the gospel but do not respond to it until many years later, when they encounter a crisis and call upon Christ to save them. But the timing of salvation and the results of our preaching are best left to the mysterious work in the heart by the Holy Spirit, which we cannot see. It is not for us to worry what the outcome will be. Our success is measured not by the number of souls we win to Christ, but by how well we have used the opportunities given to us to share the gospel with people around us.

Sometimes some of those who appear to respond to the gospel prove themselves to be false disciples, whose profession of faith is not genuine. The conversion of Simon the Sorcerer was like this. Philip the evangelist must have been quite thrilled when he saw this well-known witch-doctor giving up his witchcraft to come to Christ. But he must also have heard the disappointing news later on, that this same sorcerer had never really been converted at all. How should we respond when we hear news like that concerning those we have brought to Christ? We feel sad for them, but at the same time, we should not blame ourselves for what has happened, since we have already done our part for them.

And while we should not blame ourselves for any negative results of our efforts, we should also not pride ourselves either in any good or tremendous results from them. All the glory goes to God alone. If men and women do indeed come to know Christ through our preaching or sharing, we should never think that we are great because we did it, and

go around boasting to others about the number of souls we have led to the Lord. Rather, we should give God all the credit, and continue to be employed in doing the Lord's work.

We should therefore, not just sit back and glory in our past successes and achievements. But let us keep ourselves busy always for the Lord. Consecrating your life demands the yielding of your life to be used by God in doing whatever He directs you to do, in preaching His Word as you find opportunity, and in winning souls to Christ, by sharing the gospel and trusting Him for the results.

We found all of these things demonstrated well in the yielded life of Philip. And it would be good to ask yourself now: Is your own life going to be like that? Will you fully yield your life to God like Philip did? What are you going to do with your life?

Dear reader, God has given you only one life to live. Please invest that life wisely, by yielding it for God to use. You will find tremendous dividends from your investment. "Only one life 'twill soon be past. Only what's done for Christ will last."

Chapter 4

Characteristics of Consecration: A Living Sacrifice

Text: Hebrews 11:8-19

“ . . . a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God . . . ”
(Rom 12:1).

Abraham is one of the most important persons in the Bible. The account of his life is given in detail in 14 chapters of the book of Genesis. His name is found a total of 311 times in the Bible, and out of this, 74 of them are in the New Testament. Christ spoke about him, the Apostles wrote about him. And although he lived nearly 4,000 years ago the lessons taught by his life are still relevant to all of us today. His life stands for us as a fine example of a living sacrifice.

Sacrifice was one of the main themes of Abraham's life. The account of Abraham is actually filled with many offerings and sacrifices that he made to God. The Scriptures tell us that as he travelled from place to place in the land that God had given him, Abraham built altars to the Lord, offered up animal sacrifices, and called upon the name of the Lord. He did this at Shechem, at a place near Bethel, and also at Hebron and Beersheba. At the altar that Abraham built at Hebron, God sealed His covenant with Abraham by passing between the pieces of five animals that Abraham had sacrificed there. But of all the altars that Abraham built, the most memorable one was at Mount Moriah. There he was commanded by God to sacrifice his son Isaac. And there

Abraham showed that he was willing to do anything at all for God, even to give Him the most precious possession he had. The whole life of Abraham was therefore a living sacrifice.

It would be profitable for us to find out how Abraham was able to do this. We will ask: What were the characteristics of his life that made him a living sacrifice? Turn your Bible to Hebrews 11:8–19 to find out.

I. Abraham's Faith

The first thing you will notice about this passage is that it starts with the words, “*by faith.*” Actually this is the theme of this whole chapter of the book of Hebrews. The writer of this book lists here all of the heroes of faith of the Old Testament. And Abraham stands here as one of the more outstanding heroes of faith, judging from the number of verses that the writer devotes to him. So here we have found the very first and perhaps the most important characteristic of Abraham's consecrated life: his faith.

It was his faith in God that sustained Abraham and even prospered him. It was also his faith in God that made him righteous in God's sight. God did not regard Abraham to be righteous because of any good works that Abraham did. In fact Abraham failed a number of times to meet God's standards of goodness, but God regarded Abraham to be a righteous man because he believed God, and trusted fully in Him. This is mentioned in Genesis 15:6, “*And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.*”

Abraham did not have to wait until the end of his life to know whether he was saved or not. He did not live as though he was on probation. On the contrary, we are told that at the very moment that he began to put his faith in God's promise to him, he was already regarded by God as a righteous man. In other words, he was already fully saved from all his sins.

And yet there are many today who are sadly trying to save themselves by their own good works, and if you were to ask them whether they are saved, they will say, “I don't know. I am still trying to

get myself saved.” Those who say this are in fact showing that they are not trusting in God alone for salvation, but in their own efforts.

Was Abraham like that? Not at all. He believed in the Lord. He was persuaded and fully convinced that God will fulfil the promises He had made to him. Those who come to God today must have faith in the completed work of Jesus Christ alone. For us that is all that we need to be saved. And what is faith? Faith is a deep-seated assurance in the soul that comes from trusting totally in God, trusting particularly in His Word, in His power and in His love. Faith is resting totally upon God. Faith lays down its whole weight and expectation of mercy upon Him, willing to be fully submitted to His purpose and His power.

In 1860 there was a famous tight-rope walker called Charles Blondin. He was so good that he could walk, run, and do all kinds of things on a rope stretched across the Niagara falls—a span of 1,000 feet, 160 feet above the raging waters. Blondin had a wheelbarrow and asked a crowd: “Do you believe that I can carry a man across this rope to the other side in this wheelbarrow?” The crowd said “Yes!” Blondin then turned to the man who shouted the loudest and asked, “Sir will you kindly step into this wheelbarrow and let me take you across this rope to the other side?” And he said “No!” vehemently. Faith is not just believing that God can save us. Faith is actually entrusting ourselves fully to God alone to save us. To make this commitment we must abandon any other ground of hope and confidence.

On the other hand, however, there are many who claim that they are saved by the same faith that Abraham had, and yet their lives do not show any change at all. They think that as long as they agree in their minds to the truths of the Bible, that there is one God in three persons, that His son Jesus Christ died on the cross and was resurrected, they have their ticket to heaven, and can now proceed to be indifferent to God’s Word and careless about how they live. But they are sadly mistaken. Their faith is not true biblical faith. According to James 2:19, even the demons have this kind of faith—they also believe and tremble. So those who just merely agree with these truths are fooling themselves if they think they are saved like Abraham. The Bible tells us that Abraham’s faith in God was a faith that naturally produced a changed

life. It was not a static faith or a dead faith, but a faith that produced obedience and service to God in Abraham's life.

II. Abraham's Obedience

“By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.” The key word in this verse is the word *“obeyed.”* Abraham was brought up in the ancient city of Ur. As he lived there, God spoke to him, commanding him to leave the place. And Abraham left without knowing where he and his household would eventually settle down. This was not an easy thing for him to do.

Abraham actually enjoyed all the comforts and conveniences of city life in Ur. Discoveries have shown that the ancient city of Ur was technically very advanced and well-organised even in Abraham's time. Abraham probably had a good house to live in, a good supply of food and water, and also opportunities to engage in the lucrative business of trade and commerce. The Scriptures tell us that he was quite a well-to-do person. He had many servants in his household and he was taking care of his aged father.

And yet he was willing to leave all the comforts and conveniences of city life behind and launch out to nowhere. It is like a person who has been living all his life in a modern city suddenly deciding to move house to an isolated shack in a rural, backward village.

We can imagine what his friends and relatives might have said to him, “Abram, don't be a fool. There is no better place for you than this place. If you leave this city, you will not have a house, or water and food so easily obtainable. Your future will be uncertain and probably quite bleak. Don't do such a crazy thing. If you are not thinking about yourself, at least consider how much inconvenience you will cause to your wife Sarai, to your aged father and to the others who are with you.”

Yes, humanly speaking, what Abraham was about to do was quite a foolish thing. And I believe he was heavily criticised for this. But despite all of that, as he struggled with the decision, he could not ignore

the fact that God had given him the explicit command to leave. Finally, he yielded to God. He abandoned all the things in the city of Ur that were dear to him, and trusted fully in God. He packed up, and began the tedious journey to a place he did not know about and had never seen before. We can imagine all the ridicule and gossip that must have been on the lips of the citizens of Ur as they saw Abraham leaving.

Do you think you would have done the same thing, if you were in Abraham's shoes? Would you have been willing to abandon all your plans, your hopes, and comforts in order to do what you know God wants you to do? Would you have obeyed the Lord, or would you have excused yourself by saying, "Lord, I cannot do this. You are asking too much from me."

If we truly believe in God the way that Abraham did, we would say: "God has spoken: if I truly believe in Him, I must obey. His word and His promises are true and I can depend upon them." We need to have this kind of unquestioning obedience today. We who believe in Christ have now received God's Word, commanding us to forsake the world, to forsake sin, and self, and to journey through life with God, even though we may not know exactly where the path will lead. God says, "Trust me, I will lead you and show you each step you must take." If we have faith in Him, we simply must obey Him.

III. Abraham's Endurance

"By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise" (v 9). This verse emphasises what Abraham had to endure after he left the city of Ur. His life was now never as comfortable and as easy as he had before. He was now a stranger, a foreigner and an alien. In those days it was much harder to be a foreigner than it is today. Aliens were sometimes treated with hostility, and quite shamefully. Because of their different culture and lifestyle, people could easily spot them. And because of their ignorance, people could easily take advantage of them, cheat them, and even kidnap and enslave them.

There was no law in Canaan to protect aliens. Later on, when God gave His Law to Israel He constantly reminded the Israelites to treat aliens well. They were instructed not to harm and take advantage of foreigners who came to live among them. This evidently shows that the common practice in those days was to treat foreigners badly. They were quite unprotected and vulnerable, and so they had to take all kinds of precautions wherever they went. In the case of Abraham, we see him taking such a precaution when he brought his family to Egypt. He knew that the Egyptians would not hesitate to kill him in order to get his wife, and so he asked her to pretend to be his sister instead. He did this in a moment of spiritual weakness and was duly rebuked by God for this. But this shows us the kind of pressures and anxieties that Abraham now had as a foreigner.

Another example of the anxieties that Abraham had as an alien was with regard to his water supply. Because he needed enough water for his household as well as for his livestock, Abraham found it necessary to dig a well. He must have spent much time and effort digging and digging till he finally managed to find a good source of water. He must have been very glad that his water problem was solved. But not very long after that, the Philistines who controlled the land came and seized this well from him, and filled it up with earth. All his hard work was wasted. Abraham simply could not do anything about it because he was a foreigner and so, he had to go somewhere else to dig another well. The same thing happened again a few more times. The Philistines came and seized his wells. He must have felt quite frustrated. Finally, through God's intervention, Abraham managed to get a promise from the Philistines that they would not confiscate the last well he dug, the one at Beersheba.

This makes us wonder, that with all these things that he had to endure for so long, could Abraham not have said, "Why should I put up any more with this? I have had enough of being a foreigner: I am going to pack my bags and go back to the city of Ur, where I would not have these problems and worries anymore." And any person who did not trust in God's promises might have done just that under such circumstances. But what prevented Abraham from doing that?

According to verses 14–16,

For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

Abraham resisted the strong urge to go back to the city of Ur, because he fully believed that the Lord had better things in store for him, if he just patiently endured the inconveniences of being a foreigner. Abraham's consecrated life was characterised by endurance. He resisted the pressure to take the easy way out of a difficult situation.

As Christians, we too need to have endurance for consecrated living. Like Abraham, we are also called to be foreigners and strangers to this world. In fact in our theme verse—Romans 12:2—we are told not to be conformed to this world. In 1 John 2:15, we are told not to love the world nor the things that are in the world. James 4:4 warns us that anyone who will be a friend of the world is an enemy of God. We are therefore to be in the world, but not of the world. Consecrated living is incompatible with the lifestyle and values of the world. Therefore if you are consecrated to the Lord, the world looks at you and perceives that you are a foreigner, an alien, and a stranger to it. You are out of step with the world, and because of this you may sometimes face conflict with the world.

You will find yourself sometimes facing hostility and opposition and ridicule, and come under the pressure to conform to its standards, lifestyle and values. But you must endure all these pressures.

And to encourage you to keep on enduring, the Scriptures say that God is not ashamed to be known as your God. Look at verse 16 again: *“But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.”* When God revealed Himself to the Israelites later on, He would identify Himself by saying, *“I am the God of Abraham.”* He was not ashamed to be called Abraham's God. A good question to think about is: Would He be ashamed to be called your God? Or would the

Lord be proud to reveal Himself to the world as your God? If your life demonstrates faith, obedience and endurance for His sake, God will not be ashamed to be called your God. There is one more characteristic of consecrated living that we need to consider.

IV. Abraham's Willingness to Deny Himself

This last characteristic is the willingness to deny ourselves. Are we willing to give or offer up anything that God may require from us, even the things that may be very precious to us? Abraham was. Verse 17, *“By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son.”* This was the most difficult test that Abraham ever faced in his whole life. Abraham had been filled with great joy when his son Isaac was miraculously born. Isaac was the son that God had promised to him. He was the one through whom God would provide descendants that would be as numerous as the stars in the heavens. And yet, now God was telling him to sacrifice Isaac upon an altar, and no reasons were given at all for this.

The Bible record does not give us the details of how Abraham first reacted when he heard this command from God. But I think we can safely assume, that as a loving father, he must have been very anxious, he might have cried, and spent sleepless nights on it. Abraham definitely loved his son very much. And he must have struggled hard with the apparent paradox he faced: Wasn't Isaac the means by which God would fulfil His promises to Abraham? Why then would God now want Abraham to sacrifice him?

At this point Abraham could have easily doubted God's goodness and reasoned within himself: “This has gone over the limit. God is being too cruel, too unreasonable. Why should I do as He says?”



But finally Abraham concluded that God knows what He was doing, and must somehow be able to keep His promises, perhaps even by raising Isaac from the dead. With a very heavy heart he took his son with him up to Mount Moriah. He built an altar and then laid Isaac on it. But just before the dreaded moment when the knife was to be plunged, the Lord sent an angel to stop him. Abraham had passed the test. And God congratulated him with these words, *“now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me”* (Gen 22:12). We can imagine the great sense of relief and joy that Abraham must have felt as he received his son back.

Dear reader, if you are to consecrate your life to the Lord, will He find in you the willingness to deny yourself? Will the Lord be able to say to you, “Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld the most precious thing in thy life from Me”? Perhaps for you, that precious thing may be something different—it may be your career, or your property, or your security, or even your health. Now, I am not suggesting that He will require you to deny yourself and to say goodbye to whatever is most precious to you in life. But what I am saying is: IF God should one day require you to do it, will you be willing to sacrifice it for His sake?

Let us for a moment imagine that all the things God has blessed you with, can be placed on the palm of your hand. Here in your hand lie all the things that are of value to you in this world: your loved ones, your friends, your work, your future, your success, etc. And then God says to you, “My dear child, I have given all these things to you. Will you now let Me have them back?” Now what would your response be? Would you hold on to them even more tightly and say, “No, Lord, I want to keep them. Please don’t take them away from me!” Or would you offer them willingly to the Lord with an open palm and say, “Yes, Lord. Here they are. They are all yours to take if you wish to take them.” And then leave it to God, either to take them, or to say, “You can keep them, my child.”

The point being emphasised here is that true consecration holds back nothing from the Lord. It is being willing to relinquish all if the Lord should so require. Therefore look seriously into your heart, and be

honest to ask yourself, “Do I have these characteristics in my life: faith in God, obedience to God, the ability to endure hardship for His sake, and the willingness to deny self for His sake?”

If you cannot find these characteristics in your life, then perhaps this may mean that you have not consecrated your life to Him. Then you will really need to seriously consider doing it now, since the Word of God says, that you are constrained by “*the mercies of God . . . [to] present your [body] a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service*” (Rom 12:1). Will you do what the Word of God says then, and consecrate your life to God? “What are you going to do with your life?”

One of my former students at the Centre for Biblical Studies on the Hilltop, Philippines, answered this question by giving his life to serve the Lord. But I admire him because he did this under the most difficult circumstances. When Richard Alidon was born, his parents were dismayed to find that he was physically disabled, had very weak resistance and little physical endurance. Their hopes of having a son who would do well in life and lift them out of their poverty seemed very remote now. They lived in a little shack in Tondo, the slum area of Manila. But Richard was blessed by God with a determination to work hard against his physical infirmities, and was able to get into a public school and do well enough to make it to college.

And when the Lion’s Club of Manila heard about his case, they were so impressed with his courage and determination that they offered to give him a full scholarship to study computer science at a prestigious university in the Philippines. But Richard had, in the meantime, been saved and was an active member of Tondo Baptist Church. And though this offer would fulfil his dream to do well in life, he was confronted with God’s calling to the full-time ministry. And he finally obeyed the Lord, gave up the scholarship and enrolled instead at the Centre for Biblical Studies.

Now when I first saw Richard, I must confess that I had serious doubts that he would ever make it through his studies or in the ministry. He was stunted, and had no shoulders. His hands were gnarled and unnaturally contracted—I thought he would not be able to write. And

his speech was slurred and could hardly be heard. But God had given Richard the same promise He gave to Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:9, “*My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.*” And he simply trusted God to fulfil this promise for him. With God’s help, Richard soon did better than all his fellow students. He suffered much and endured more hardship in his studies than all the other students and, after four years of study, graduated in 1996 with first class honours. And over the years, he had also gone for speech training and was able to preach well after that. Since his graduation, Richard has continued to serve the Lord faithfully, in preaching, in conducting Bible studies, and in teaching at the Centre for Biblical Studies. I trust that God is going to use him to do great things.

Dear reader, if God can so marvellously use the life of one who is so physically handicapped and infirmed, should you ever think that He cannot do much with your life?

Chapter 5

Hindrances to Consecration: Worldly Temptations

Text: Luke 12:16-21

“And be not conformed to this world” (Rom 12:2).

We arrive now at the only prohibition found in our theme verses. This prohibition reveals that there are things in this world that can hinder you in your consecration. And if you are not careful, you may find yourself drawn irresistibly into them.

A well-known fairy tale is often told about how a town called Hamlyn employed a pied piper to get rid of all its rats. What the pied piper did was to play a magic tune on his pipe that somehow charmed all the rats and led them irresistibly out of the town, and into a river where they drowned. The situation in the world is like that. There is a magic tune being played by the media for all to hear. Our senses are bombarded every day of the week with worldly trends, values, and attitudes. And their basic message is, “You must



get everything you can for yourself out of this life, so make yourself rich as quickly you can, and then make yourself look good and feel good and enjoy yourself.”

And most people living in the world today have somehow been mysteriously charmed by this message to follow it and to be conformed to it, very much like the rats that were charmed by the tune of the Pied Piper. And as we see our friends, our neighbours, and our colleagues at work, all being enticed by the same tune, we sometimes feel ourselves drawn to follow it also, unaware of the dangerous end that it will lead us into.

Dear reader, if this is the case with you now, then awake out of the charmed stupor you are in, and live in reality! Listen to a parable that Jesus told. This parable may help you to refocus your life and to take a step backward and see clearly all the things that you are doing and pursuing from a true, undistorted and biblical perspective of life.

The parable is about a person who was very successful and great by the world’s standards, and yet by God’s standards, he really became a fool. That is why this parable is entitled “The Rich Fool.” First of all, it is good to find out precisely what occasioned the telling of this parable. According to Luke 12:13, someone had made a request to Jesus, asking Him to settle a little legal dispute for him. “*Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me.*” But Jesus refused to become embroiled in this legal dispute over inheritance rights, and said, “*Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?*”

Why did Jesus refuse him? It was not because He did not care for him. Jesus did care. But it was because He saw that the heart of the whole matter was a problem of the heart—a covetous heart. This is a problem that has brought forth and still continues to bring forth thousands of legal disputes between persons, right up to our present time. A look at the cases that are heard in the courts of law every day will confirm this. Most of them deal with claims made by people for inheritance or for property, and claims for damages.

Everyday, people take one another to court for all kinds of claims. How many times have you heard of cases when a rich man dies without

leaving behind any will and his children then fight with one another to get a bigger share of his estate? Brothers and sisters within a family even become bitter enemies over their inheritance. And there will always be such lawsuits, and legal disputes like this as long as people continue to believe that a man's life consists in the abundance of his earthly wealth and material assets. This is the basic premise behind all greed and covetousness: *That a person's life finds its value, meaning, comfort and happiness in the abundance of the things which he possesses.* But this is an utterly false premise to believe. And if you believe this premise, God wants you to change your mind and reject it right now. In verse 15, the Lord issues two very strong warning words against covetousness. He tells us to *"take heed, and beware of"* it. For nothing can be further from the truth than this foolish premise.

God considers all who have been deceived into believing it as fools. They have made themselves just like the man in this parable that Jesus related here in verses 16–21: the Rich Fool.



According to this parable, a certain rich man had been blessed with a very good harvest. So plentiful was his harvest that there was no more place for him to store all the surplus fruits. But instead of thanking God for the good harvest, he worries himself with the thought: *"What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?"* One very obvious thing that he could have done was to give away the extra fruits to others who had no food to eat, to the needy around him. After all, he had more than sufficient fruit now for himself and also more than he had expected.

But he did not do that. Instead he decided to build bigger barns to hoard up all that he had, because he wanted to keep his increase all to

himself. “It’s all mine to keep,” he thought. His success had got to his head. It made him feel very high. It gave him a sense of euphoria. He felt strong because of his wealth. Perhaps he even felt invincible because of his wealth. In his mind he envisioned himself being well laid up for the rest of his own life. “*Take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry,*” he told himself.

Everything had gone so well for him so far, and so everything has got to continue to go well for him, so he assumed. He thought he had mastered life and earned success, congratulating himself for his good fortune. That was how proud and self-centred he had become. Notice how many times this man talked about himself in verses 17–19,

What shall I do, because I have no room . . . This will I do: I will pull down my barns, . . . and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul . . .

He referred to himself no less than ten times altogether!

And sadly, that this is the way that the great majority of people in the world see things today. This kind of planning is very popular, judging from the number of books, courses and seminars with titles like “How to Plan and Make Money,” “How to Plan Your Estate,” “How to Plan Your Career,” and “How to Plan Your Future.” These titles seem to promise people some kind of winning method or formula that will absolutely guarantee success. And as you live in a competitive environment, you may easily get caught up with this worldly wisdom and spirit of ambitious, self-promoting kind of planning that utterly excludes God.

When you get your first taste of sweet success in business, and see how much money you have made, all of a sudden, you feel exalted. You feel a sense of conquest. You feel as if you are high above the clouds, that you have made it to the very top. And you say to yourself, “Oh it feels so nice to be so prosperous and so wealthy. I love it and I want more of it.” And then you pursue it and confidently plan to make yourself more and more prosperous, because you want to have more of that nice exalted feeling of being rich!

But then something quite unexpected comes along and spoils your plans. The business deal order that you needed fell through, or perhaps some other businessman cut in and clinched the deal first, ahead of you. And then you realise how foolish you had been. That high feeling you felt was just a false sense of security, invincibility and power. It was not real. Dear reader, material prosperity and wealth have a way of making a person quite blind to reality. And you must be very careful not to let it give you false visions of your own greatness. If you are not careful, and persist in entertaining these false visions in your heart, you may end up just like the rich fool in this parable, whose big bubble was burst when God said to him in verse 20, *“Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?”*

In order to help keep you from becoming fools toward God by entertaining such vain visions in our prosperity, take heed now to three important guidelines you should follow.

I. Do Not Plan Your Life as if You Will Live in This World Forever

In verse 19, this rich man made one very great mistake. He said to himself: *“Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years”* (v 19). Do you see what his mistake was? This man arrogantly assumed that he would have many more years to live. But God had other plans for him—he died that very night and never had the chance to carry out his plans and enjoy his success!

It is sometimes quite frightening to see the way that some people plan—they plan as if they will go on living forever and ever. They just assume that they will not die and then take big loans, mortgage their houses and become indebted to venture out into some big investment. And when death comes unexpectedly before they can carry out their plans, they leave their families with the awful burden of paying off the huge debt.

Please be careful not to make the same mistake. Every time you seem to do well and think of making further gains, always remind

yourself that you are still a mortal creature. Never assume that you will have many more years to live. You might die at any time. You may even have the cleanest bill of health from your doctor and eat only the healthiest food, and get lots of exercise. You may be the safest driver in the world, and take every possible precaution to avoid accidents. But all of these measures still do not remove the possibility that you might die at any time. Ultimately, it is God who determines when your life will end, not you. When God says to you, as He said to the rich man, “*this night thy soul shall be required of thee,*” you will not be able to say, “No, please wait, I need to carry out all my plans first. I cannot die now.”

Psalm 90 is an important psalm that tells you how frail your life is. Verses 5 and 6 read:

Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep: in the morning they are like grass which groweth up. In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth.

These words express the truth that people are all mere mortal beings whose existence in this life is only temporary. James, in his epistle in the New Testament, puts it this way: “*For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away*” (4:14). If you wake up early in the morning and gaze upon a field you might see the morning mist covering the ground like a carpet. It is a beautiful sight. But when the rays of the sun break through the branches of the trees and reach the grass, the mist immediately disappears. How short lived is that morning mist! Here, just for a passing glorious moment, and then, gone! And that is a realistic way of looking at your own life. You live on this earth only for a passing glorious moment, and then shortly, you too are gone!

A person may spend all his life planning, investing, prospering and building up a vast personal empire of wealth, power and influence in this world, but in the end, death comes and brings all of that to an end. As a well-known poet once observed: “The boast of heraldry, The pomp of power, And all that beauty, all that wealth ever gave, await alike the inevitable hour—the paths of glory lead but to the grave.”

How frail your life is! The news is filled everyday with reports of people dying in aeroplane crashes, earthquakes, typhoons and floods. When you hear of disasters like these, you might be tempted to think: “that will never happen to me. I am really quite safe over here.” But that is probably the way every victim of these disasters must have thought. None of them ever thought or expected that they would die at the very next moment. Dear reader, your life may be brought to an end at any time, even at a time when you least expect death to come. And since you could die at any time you should therefore:

II. Make Provisions for Life After Death, and Not Just for This Life

This is the second guideline you should follow, if we do not want to become fools in God’s sight. Don’t you think that it is an utterly foolish thing to make full provision for ourselves for this life but none for our life after death? This reveals nothing less than a lack of foresight. Many people in this world are very good at making long term plans for their future and even for their children’s future and grandchildren’s future. Many know how to save, how to invest and insure themselves against every contingency in life. But the sad thing is that they do not look far enough. All their long term planning is not long enough. Their planning stops short of death and makes no consideration at all for life in the long eternity of millions of years that lie beyond this present life. Those who make provisions and long term plans only for this present life seem to overlook one very simple and obvious question, the question that is found in verse 20: “*Whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?*”

Please think about this question as it applies to your own life: “*Whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?*” You spend about half of your life getting everything you need and want in life, and then you spend the other half of your life trying to maintain and keep all the things you have gained in the first half of your life. But then, at the end of the day, the big question comes, “*Whose shall these things be?*” Will they remain in your possession? Can you continue to hold on to them and keep them with you for ever and ever?

For hundreds of years, men on earth have been dreaming an impossible dream: the dream of bringing one's wealth across the barrier of death. The ancient Egyptians thought they had found the answer when they built huge pyramids and buried their dead pharaohs with all the gold and possessions they would need for a comfortable afterlife. But it did not work. The only ones who gained from all this were grave robbers who broke into the tombs and carried them all away, even taking the preserved remains of these pharaohs to sell to some museum.

And then a long time ago, the people of China thought that they had found the perfect answer to this dream. They believed that things that are burned up would somehow reach the spirits of the dead in the underworld. And so when someone dies, many Chinese today burn piles of incense paper, hoping that these would somehow be transformed into real currency that departed loved ones can use to get their material assets in the underworld. And not only that, when someone dies they also burn big houses, cars, clothes, even TV sets and video players all made of paper, hoping against hope that the dead will somehow receive them in real functional condition. But again it doesn't work. Nothing is achieved by all this.

Dear reader, there is absolutely no way that wealth and possessions can be taken beyond the grave. There is no way at all that we can take anything from this world with us when we die. God's Word reveals this sobering truth about man in Ecclesiastes 5:15, *"As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand."* Paul the Apostle echoes the same truth in 1 Timothy 6:7, *"For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out."*

Some have sought a more pragmatic solution to this. They think: "Since I cannot take anything with me, at least I can leave them all to my children who will be able to enjoy them and then pass it on to their children." It does at least bring some comfort to imagine that our personal wealth may become a resource or foundation that our descendants can build upon and develop into a large empire. But this is just wishful thinking. In reality, wealth does not stay in a family for very long. In fact there is a Chinese saying that wealth can only last for

three generations. All the wealth that one generation accumulates is often dissipated in the generations that follow through bad investments, misfortune, disasters, wars, sicknesses, a decadent lifestyle, and extravagant spending.

So let us not be foolish but wise. Since it is certain that you can carry nothing out of this world with you, and that whatever you have to leave behind will not last for very long, please do not waste your precious life just accumulating all kinds of wealth and material assets. The world around you, your closest friends and neighbours around you may all be rushing madly after all these things, but you don't have to follow them. You don't have to keep up with them. Never mind if you find yourself being left behind. It's a futile pursuit anyway. As God's Word in the book of Ecclesiastes says, it is "*all . . . vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.*"

There are better things for you to pursue. Things that deserve your time and trouble, things that will last for ever and ever, things that will make you rich toward God, things that will lay up "*treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal*" (Matt 6:20). Make up your mind today to pursue the riches that are of infinite worth, riches that are worth far more than all the riches this world can offer to you.

In all human history, there was never anyone who had to make a more difficult and decisive choice of this nature, than Moses:

By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward (*Heb 11:24–26*).

What is so striking about this passage is the fact that Moses attached greater value to the reproach of Christ, to being a servant of God, than to becoming probably the next king of Egypt.

From what we know about Egypt in the time of Moses, it was the world's richest and strongest nation at that time. It was very powerful

both economically and politically. During the 18th dynasty, Egypt had an empire that extended along the northern coast of Africa and even right up into Palestine.

Some of the treasures of Egypt that are mentioned in verse 26 have been discovered in the ancient tombs of the pharaohs, and they have been described as being astoundingly fabulous. Furniture, decorations, clothing, ornaments all of the very best quality, intricately crafted, and made with expensive material like gold, ivory, ebony and precious stones. And Moses could have had all these treasures of Egypt for himself. They were all his to take. As a prince of Egypt, Moses had known all the luxury of life in the Egyptian palace with a multitude of slaves to do every menial task for him. And of all people, he was one who could have said to himself, like the rich man in our parable, *“My soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry.”*



But unlike the rich man, Moses esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. He rejected the most lavish luxuries the world could offer, in order to become a servant of God. In the eyes of the world today, Moses would be considered a fool, perhaps even the greatest fool of all time. But in the eyes of God, He became richer than the all the richest men living in the world today.

Dear reader, there is no loss at all in forsaking the world's riches for the sake of God. Though the world may regard you as a fool for doing this, in God's sight you are the richest person in the world!

III. Be Rich Toward God, and Not to Yourself

“So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (v 21). While this verse warns us against storing up things for ourselves and not being rich toward God, it also teaches us an important lesson: the lesson that we should seek to be rich toward God. How does one become rich toward God? The answer that God’s Word gives is simple: *“seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness”* (Matt 6:33). In Colossians 3:1–2, we find a similar answer: *“seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.”*

There was once a young lady whose Christian father had just died. She went to visit her father’s business associate. He was not a Christian. He lived only to amass riches. But this is what he said to the girl: “Your father was a good man. He lived for God and for others. His chief joy was to bring happiness to others. I have never known a man more generous with his money than your father. Right up to the end of his beautiful life, his thoughts were always of others. In death he went to his riches. But in death, I will be leaving my riches which I could have used for God and for others.”

To be rich toward God is to live your life not for yourself, but for God. It is to live a consecrated life motivated by loving God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. God’s Word tells us that those who love God are the ones who will inherit His kingdom. This is stated in James 2:5, *“Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?”*

Therefore, you need to make a choice concerning what you are going to do with your life: Do you want to be rich in God’s sight or to be fools in God’s sight? If you choose to be like the rich man in this parable and strive to become rich in the sight of this world and make plans to lay up goods that you may enjoy for many years in this life, then you will become fools to God.

But if you choose to plan your life expecting to die at any time, and make provisions now for the life you will have after death, by

consecrating your life to God, then you will become rich toward God, even though the world may call you a fool. In short, do you want to be Rich to the world but a Fool to God, or Rich to God but a Fool to the world? Which one will you choose? Please choose well.

Chapter 6

The Objective Of Consecration: A Transformed Life

Text: Romans 6:1-4

*“. . . but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind”
(Rom 12:2).*

The resurrection of Christ is the central tenet of Christianity. Everything we believe in stands or falls with it. Even the Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15, that if Jesus had not been raised from the dead, then our faith is empty, we are still in our sins, those who have died believing in Him are all perished. And He says *“If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable”* (v 19). So important is the event of Christ’s resurrection in the whole of history that scores of scholars have debated over it and volumes of books have been written about it. And till today, no one has ever been able to successfully disprove the resurrection of Christ.

A former chief justice of England by the name of Lord Darling, said this, “In its favour as a living truth there exists such overwhelming evidence, positive and negative, factual and circumstantial, that no intelligent jury in the world could fail to bring in a verdict that the resurrection story is true.”

But perhaps far greater than the opinions of scholars and judges is the compelling evidence of the countless lives that have been transformed as a result of it. It is Christ’s resurrection that now enables

us to walk in newness of life. As God's Word tells us in Romans 6:4, *"Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."*

The glorious power of Christ's resurrection alone can transform the lives of people, where other means and methods have failed. Neither education, nor rehabilitation, nor penal institutions have ever successfully changed the lives of people. But the resurrection power of Christ has seen great success. And we can still see it working today. Let me tell you about some of the lives that have been changed in the Philippines.

Down in the southern island of Mindanao, there was a young man by the name of Juliето Aningga. This young man was talented and strong, but with no one to guide him, he quickly fell into a life of sin and vice. He became a leader of a notorious gang of youths in his village. Together, Juliето and his gang would go around intimidating and terrorizing other youths, getting into gang fights, and then end their escapades with a drinking binge.

On some mornings, Juliето would wake up and find himself lying in a drain or sewer with no recollection at all of how he got there or what happened the night before. This kind of life went on, until one day, an uncle, who was a Christian, confronted Juliето with the gospel of Christ. From then onward, his life was gradually transformed by the resurrection power of Christ. So thankful was Juliето for his new-found salvation that he consecrated his life and worked hard to pay for a boat trip to Manila to enrol at the Centre for Biblical Studies.

And after four years of study, he graduated and is now the assistant pastor of a church in Metro Manila. His life is making a great impact for Christ, especially on the youths in the church. When Juliето was still a student at CBS, he made a trip back to his hometown during a summer vacation. There he visited the youths who were members of his gang. And they were glad to see him, but could not at first recognise him, because he was no longer the reckless gang leader they used to know. His life had been transformed!

Another person whose life was wonderfully transformed was Federico Gulle. Federico, or “Jhun” as we call him, grew up in the slums of Manila. As his family was poor and had no means of sending him to school, Jhun became one of the many street urchins weaving in and out of the traffic and selling cigarettes to jeepney drivers. Jhun himself started smoking at a very young age. And Jhun would have continued to be a street urchin perhaps for the rest of his life, if a believer from a church nearby had not persuaded him to attend Sunday School.

From then onward, his life was changed. He began to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, and gave up smoking, and with some help he was able to complete both elementary and high school. Then after consecrating his life to the Lord, he enrolled in Bible College. When he graduated, he pastored a small church while continuing to study for his Masters degree at CBS. Shortly after getting his masters degree, he was called to become the pastor of Villamor Biblical Church. And this was the same church that had taken him in as a street urchin. But no one who sees him now would imagine that this well-educated and dedicated pastor was once that little street urchin! The resurrection power of Christ had transformed his life.

These are a few of the many lives that have undergone the transforming process that is possible because of the resurrection of Christ. And they are most relevant to our theme of consecration that we have been having for our messages. In fact our theme passage from Romans 12:1–2 tells us that those who consecrate their lives should go through this transforming process. The transformation of our lives becomes the ultimate objective, goal and result of consecrating our lives to God, as the passage tells us:

“ . . . but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind . . . ”

Now there is an interesting feature about the word “*transformed*” in this verse. The word used in the original Greek text for this word is actually derived from the same word from which we get the term “*metamorphosis*.” This, as we know, refers to that amazing process in God’s creation in which an insect is transformed from one form to another: like a caterpillar being transformed into a butterfly. And this

thought must make us all the more excited to be transformed. Let us yield ourselves fully to this metamorphosis of our lives, in order that we may gradually become inwardly beautiful, exhibiting all the grace and beauty that is found in Christ. I would like us to consider now what we need to do in order to be transformed. There are four basic steps in this transforming process:

I. Make No Provision for the Flesh

Romans 13:14 says, “*But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.*” 1 John 2:16–17 says,

For all that is in the world, **the lust of the flesh**, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

There are four ways for us to overcome the lusts of the flesh:

- a. Be settled in your convictions: That immorality of any form is evil and a hateful sin to God. Don’t make exceptions or excuses for yourself.
- b. Starve the urge and do not feed it. Deliberately avoid any thing that will excite the desires of the flesh, especially books, magazines, newspapers.
- c. Sublimate the urge by a greater desire: occupy yourself with other pursuits that are worthwhile. The best desire that you can use to sublimate the urge is the desire to love God with all your heart, soul and mind. Isaiah 26:3 says, “*Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.*”
- d. Subdue the urge through Christ’s power. Philippians 4:13 says, “*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*” The next three steps tell us how we can be transformed through what God has provided for us.

II. Renew Your Mind and Conscience With God's Word

Romans 2:14–15 teaches that conscience or moral awareness is inborn:

For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.

Therefore everyone knows that there is right and wrong, though not all will agree on precisely what is right and wrong. Man's conscience has been distorted by his sinful cultural environment and his state of separation from God, who is the source of moral light. Man's conscience is therefore not trustworthy anymore. However, it can be renewed and be made increasingly reliable.

When we were born again, our conscience was regenerated. 1 Corinthians 2:14–16 says:

But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

If this regenerated mind or conscience is trained by the study of the Word of God, and becomes obedient and sensitive to the Holy Spirit, it will become increasingly reliable. Hebrews 5:14 says, "*But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses [conscience] exercised to discern both good and evil.*"

Let us train our conscience to evaluate any questionable practice we are faced with, by using principles from Holy Scripture. The renewing of our regenerated minds and consciences to discern good and evil comes from studying the written, revealed will of God in the Bible. In Scripture, God reveals His will through instruction in right thinking and

right behaviour, through direct commandments, through principles, and through the example of good and bad behaviour. The Word of God is like a mirror in which we see ourselves as we really are, revealing all the blemishes we had that we are not aware of.

But not only that, it's like a magic mirror, because if used properly, we will see not only ourselves, but the image of Christ in it, and the more time we spend looking into it, the more we are transformed into the image of Christ.

2 Corinthians 3:18 says, *“But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”* The idea of change here refers to the wonderful power working in our lives when we read the Word of God and behold the image of God contained in it. This divine power that accompanies the reading of God's Word transforms us into the image we behold. This power cannot be seen, but its results become evident when our consciences are trained by it and our lives becomes more and more conformed to the likeness of Christ. This power is the power of the Holy Spirit.

We must diligently feed ourselves daily with God's Word but at the same time we must depend on God the Holy Spirit to lead, guide, direct and move us to do His will. This brings us to the next step we need for our lives to be transformed.

III. Walk in the Spirit Daily

The Holy Spirit already indwells us if we are truly born-again Christians. Ephesians 1:13 tells us, *“In whom [Christ] ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.”* Therefore every true Christian already has within him the full potential to manifest the Holy Spirit's power. But for that power to be manifested, the second condition needs to be met.

We need to be constantly filled with the Spirit, or walk in the Spirit. This is commanded in Ephesians 5:18 which says, *“And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.”* Galatians

5:16 says, “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.”

What does it mean for us to be filled with the Spirit? Now it does not mean speaking in tongues or seeking to experience ecstatic emotions. It means that we must consciously submit or surrender ourselves daily to the influence and control of the Holy Spirit that dwells within us. This is an individual process that needs to be renewed again and again, because we often tend to forget to let the Spirit of God lead us, and take back the control of our own lives from Him.

How do we know if we are filled with the Spirit? When we are filled with the Spirit, our conduct would have certain unmistakable characteristics—described in Galatians 5:22–23 as the fruit of the Spirit. These characteristics are: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance.

When we are filled with the Spirit, we will also desire to pray and to obey God’s Word, living to please the Lord. But what if we find ourselves lapsing again into thoughts and actions that are worldly, sinful and unworthy of Christ? It means that we have temporarily lost the filling of the Spirit and we have fallen out of step with the Holy Spirit.

Then we would need to consciously seek that filling again by confessing our sins and submitting the control of our lives once again to the Holy Spirit. The ideal situation is that we should be filled with the Spirit at all times without any lapses, but very few have succeeded in doing that. Nevertheless, it still remains our responsibility to live a Spirit-filled life.

Therefore the challenge to all of us here is this: We must all commit ourselves to consistently live Spirit-filled lives from this day onward. This, together with the other two steps we saw earlier, will gradually transform our lives so that we will be perfect, always doing the “*good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God*” (Rom 12:2). Let us summarise these steps: 1. Make No Provision For the Flesh, 2. Renew Your Minds and Consciences with God’s Word, and 3. Walk in the Spirit Daily.

Here is an analogy. God the Father is like the General Manager of manufacturing corporation, and He gives the directive: “*Be thou perfect.*” In order for this directive to be carried out, a prototype or pattern is first needed. For no man since Adam and Eve was ever perfect. Where can such a pattern be found? This is where God the Son comes and provides one. By living as a man on earth, His human life became the perfect working model of one that fulfils the divine directive. His life on earth was truly perfect. Now with the directive and the pattern provided, the next important question is the means of production. Who will now work with the raw material of saved believers to produce, out of them, copies of the pattern? This is where God the Holy Spirit comes in. He takes on this role, by actually dwelling in our lives from the moment we are saved, and gradually transforming us by His Word until we are fully conformed to the pattern of Jesus Christ.

Now all three things are therefore in place: the directive, the pattern and the means of production. And this means that everything that is needed for us to become perfect is already in place. When God tells us to become perfect, He does not leave us to figure out for ourselves how this will be done. He provides everything that we need for the whole transformation process. All that we need to do is to yield ourselves to the process daily.

Therefore the challenge to all of us here is this: We must all commit ourselves to consistently let God work in our lives from this day onward. That is not easy to do. Because what often happens is that we start off with great zeal and resolve to practise all of these things but after some time the desire dies down, we run out of steam, and we find ourselves once again going back to our old sinful ways. So the fourth and final step is important.

IV. Maintain the Desire in Our Hearts

God has provided all that we need for holy living. We have seen what He has provided: the regenerated Conscience, the Word of God which we can use to train the conscience, the power of the Holy Spirit. But it is our responsibility to constantly apply ourselves to godliness.

We must maintain the desire in our hearts to study His Word, to train our conscience and to walk in the Spirit daily.

This desire is the key that releases the effectiveness and power of all that God has provided for transforming our lives. So ultimately, the secret of success in having a transformed life is found in keeping the desire, or the right attitude in our heart, for these things. Let us turn our Bibles to Proverbs 4:23, “*Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.*”

I trust that we will apply these four steps for good success in having a transformed life. There is just one last point that needs to be mentioned. This point concerns a question that may be on your mind right now, and which has been debated by many for a long time. “Can a believer ever attain to becoming sinlessly perfect in this life? If we were to try our very best, can we actually succeed in becoming fully like our Lord Jesus Christ in every way, including his sinlessness?”

Some say, “Yes, it must be possible because God would never want us to pursue a goal or objective we could never reach.” And they say that if we want to motivate believers to pursue the objective of a transformed life, we can’t do it unless they can believe that they can reach that goal. If you tell a person to strive after a prize and then tell him that he can never get it, then he would probably not even try to get it. He would say, “It is futile.” And so they teach the doctrine of an attainable sinless perfection in order to get people moving towards it.

No matter how good their intentions may be, those who hold this teaching are way off the mark. The Scriptures evidently show us that though we are to strive to be sinlessly perfect, we can never reach or attain full perfection in this life. As long as we live in this world, and no matter how hard we try, we will always have to struggle with our flesh, we will still need to contend with sin, and even the best of saints will fall into sin in an unguarded moment.

Paul himself speaks in Romans 7 about his daily need to depend on the Holy Spirit because of this struggle in his life. Let us read Romans 7:18–25,

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

In Philippians 3:12–14, Paul also says quite plainly that he has not attained perfection, but is still pressing on toward it:

Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

So then if you are actively pursuing sinless perfection in your life, and someone comes to you and says, “Why are you striving so hard to reach a goal you can never attain?” you can say “I’m just following what the Apostle Paul did.” But, besides that you can also add, “What difference should it make if I cannot be sinlessly perfect now? As long as I know that this is what God wants me to be, then I must want to be what He wants me to be, and with His help I will not give up trying to come as close as I can to sinless perfection, awaiting that wonderful day when I will be promoted to glory either by death or by the Rapture, at which time I will be totally like Christ, perfect in every way.”

One young lady, by the name of Martha Snell Nicholson, longed so much for this goal of total perfection that she wrote a little poem to express her desire: It goes like this:

To Be Like Him

*What can it mean to be like Him?
I, to be like my dear Lord?
I could not believe it, had I not
The promise of His precious Word.*

*I, with my follies and failures,
I with my weakness and sin,
To be like the Lord in His beauty,
Perfect without and within?*

*He, whom the angels, adoring
Veil from His glory, their eyes;
He, who one glad day will take me
To dwell in His home in the skies?*

*Oh, I am weary with waiting,
Sick of this old self of mine.
Come quickly, Lord Jesus, come quickly
And give me an image like Thine!*

Chapter 7

The Pursuit of Consecration: Commitment to Do the Will of God

Text: Luke 9:57-62

“. . . that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom 12:2).

A consecrated life is one that consciously keeps on seeking God’s will and doing it. No person can ever live a consecrated life if he or she is not committed to do the will of God. In fact our theme passage of Scripture shows the important relationship between consecration and the will of God.

And therefore an issue that we must settle in our hearts before consecrating ourselves is our commitment to do the will of God. Are we willing to put God’s will above our own at all times and in every choice we make? I trust that this chapter will help us to settle this issue. But when this issue is settled, there will be yet another question for us to answer, “What is the will of God?” Many people today mistakenly claim that they are submitting themselves to God’s will when what they really are doing is their own will. And one day they might be very disappointed to find that out. Jesus Himself said in Matthew 7:21, *“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.”*

And how can we know God’s will, in order to do it? The answer to this is quite simple. God has revealed His will to us in His Word.

Through this Book, God has made known for all time exactly what His will is. Now, besides studying the Scriptures we can also make it our prayer each day to ask God to reveal His specific will for us. Ask Him, “*Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*” (cf Acts 9:6). And we must ask God to guide us to do His will especially in important decisions in life, and trust that He will use our own circumstances, fellow believers and the inward prompting of the Holy Spirit to lead us in the right direction. But what do we do when faced with a questionable matter, where it is difficult for us to know what God’s will is?

Then we must be guided by scriptural principles. Here is a list of 13 questions (taken from Robert McQuilkin, *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics* [Illinois: Tyndale House Publications, Inc, 1989]) that may perhaps help you when you want to determine what God’s will is in any difficult situation you face.

1. **Is it for the Lord? Does it bring praise to Him?**

“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31).

See also Romans 14:6–8.

2. **Can I do it in His name (on His authority, implicating Him)? Can I thank Him for it?**

“And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Col 3:17).

3. **Can I take Jesus with me? Would Jesus do it?**

“Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?” (Ps 139:7).

“Christ liveth in me” (Gal 2:20).

“Christ . . . leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Pet 2:21).

See also Matthew 28:19–20; John 14:16–17, 23.

4. **Does it belong in the home of the Holy Spirit?**

“What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor 6:19–20).

See also Ephesians 4:30.

5. **Is it of faith? Do I have misgivings?**

“And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom 14:23).

“Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God” (1 John 3:21).

6. **Does it positively benefit, build up (not simply, “Is it harmless?”)?**

“Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another” (Rom 14:19).

“Let all things be done unto edifying” (1 Cor 14:26).

See also Romans 15:2; 1 Corinthians 10:8; Ephesians 4:12–16.

7. **Does it spring from, or lead to, love of this world and its value system?**

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15).

See also Mark 9:47; 11:14–15.

8. **Does it involve union with an unbeliever?**

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?” (2 Cor 6:14).

9. **Does it come from or have the potential of leading to bondage?**

“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not” (1 Cor 10:23).

10. **Is the motive pride, or love?**

“Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know” (1 Cor 8:1–2).

11. **Is a godly mind-set the context of my decision on the matter?**

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Phil 4:8).

See also Romans 12:1–2.

12. **What does the church say about it?**

“For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men” (Rom 14:18).

“For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things” (Acts 15:28).

See also Romans 14:16.

13. **Would I like to be doing this when Jesus comes?**

“And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming. . . . we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (1 John 2:28; 3:2–3).

See also 1 Thessalonians 5:2–4; Matthew 24:44–51; Luke 23:34–35.

And so, we have very briefly covered the salient points on how we may know God's will. But the main focus of our message will not be on that. Let us assume now that we already know what God's will for us is through the knowledge of His Word, through prayer and the use of these questions. The more needful issue that we want to focus our attention on now is the choice to do God's will rather than our own will. This is the more crucial and difficult part. It is no good to know God's will if we do not finally do it.

There is one passage of the book of Luke where we find three persons who misunderstood what it means to submit themselves to God's will. In Luke 9:57–62:

And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

These three persons were perhaps just a few out of the many people who were attracted to Jesus Christ. And many were attracted to Him because He performed great miracles: enabling the blind to see, the lame to walk, casting out demons. At the beginning of the same chapter (Luke 9:12–17), Jesus had performed the miracle of feeding the 5,000. These 5,000 people saw with their own eyes how He could multiply five loaves and two fishes into enough food to feed them. Perhaps these three persons were among those who had eaten some of the miraculously multiplied food.

Now many people who experience these miracles would perhaps have reacted by thinking, "If Jesus can do all these wonderful things then surely He can meet all of my needs. If I want to benefit and gain

from this then I must follow Him. This is a great opportunity that I must not lose.” And many, like these three people would then come and express their desire to follow Jesus.

Now, if Jesus were not the Son of God, but a politician, He might have been very happy to welcome all of them. Such a massive show of support would have been any politician’s dream. But Jesus did not welcome them. In fact He actually turned away many who wanted to follow Him. Why did He do this? Didn’t He want to have more followers? No, Jesus wanted more than that: He wanted followers who would be fully committed to Him. Anything less than full commitment to do His will, will not do.

Today the Lord Jesus still demands that same kind of full commitment from those who would follow Him. And just like the three men in our passage, they call Him “Lord.” But unfortunately many people who call Jesus their Lord, do not really understand the full implications of that lordship. How about you? Do you know what it means? If you want to know what it means then let us look carefully at the replies that Jesus gave to the three prospective disciples. From these replies we will discover that there are at least three things required of us for commitment to do God’s Will rather than our own will.

I. We Must Be Willing to Bear The Cost of Doing God’s Will

According to verse 57, the first man promised, “*I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.*” “I will follow you wherever you may go.” This sounds wonderful. But what exactly did this man have in mind when he said this? Perhaps he was thinking about how wonderful it would be to follow Christ, how glamorous it would be to be a part of His great holy enterprise, an exciting movement, a worthy cause. There is great glory and prestige gained by becoming a part of it. So it was really the fulfilment of his own will of attaining such glory that this man was thinking about, rather than doing God’s will.

Therefore, in this passage, Jesus did not want the first man to think of the glory of being His follower. Instead he wanted him to know that

there is a cost to bear. This cost is commitment, without any conditions—an *unconditional* commitment.

Jesus therefore said to him, “*Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.*” Jesus was saying that even the lowliest creatures in nature have a relatively comfortable life compared to His life. He was saying, “If you really want to follow Me and do God’s will, are you willing to live the way I live? Are you willing to give yourself fully to this cause even if it means enduring hardship, discomfort and inconvenience? And even if it means that you may be persecuted, and rejected by those around you?”

The objective in living that Christ always had, was to do God’s will. And therefore He allowed nothing to hinder Him from the work of promoting God’s Kingdom, the work of saving sinners. He allowed absolutely nothing to hinder Him from the work of teaching and revealing God’s Word. All of these comprised God’s will for Jesus. Therefore He devoted Himself to these things most strenuously, until He finally bore the ultimate cost of sacrificing His own life on the cross. So now, if you want to follow Christ, how much are you willing to sacrifice in order to do God’s will? How much of your own comforts and privileges are you willing to give up, to fulfil this objective? What cost are you willing to bear for His will to be done in your life?

Jesus said, “*The Son of man hath not where to lay his head.*” Do you think it would be right for us to enjoy so many comforts, when our Master had none of them? Are we greater than our Master? If we are not willing to humble ourselves and face the same kind of difficulties and discomforts that Jesus faced in order to do God’s will, then in effect, we make ourselves greater than our Master. Now there were a number of occasions in the Scriptures when Jesus said that a disciple is not greater than his master.

One instance is found in John 13:12–16. This took place just after Jesus had washed the feet of His disciples at the Last Supper.

So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed

your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.

The washing of feet here symbolises humility and service. Jesus wanted His disciples to be characterised by this same humility and service He had. To be a disciple or follower of Christ means making His desires our desires, making His goals our goals, making His attitudes our attitudes. And this means that a disciple must also be willing to face the same kind of difficulties and discomforts that Christ faced in order to do the will of God. This may mean giving up some privileges and comforts which we greatly love and cherish. There is a cost to bear in doing God's will.

You may be thinking right now, "Oh, that cost is too great for me to bear. How can I ever attain to the level of commitment that Jesus wants of me as His disciple?" Dear reader, there is only one way—to love Him with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. When you are constrained by such love, no cost will be too great to bear for Him.

II. We Must Be Available to Do God's Will

A person cannot follow Jesus if he does not make himself available to follow him. Actually, availability is very important in any kind of commitment. For example, a student would like to do well in his studies, to graduate with first class honors, and get a prestigious scholarship. But to be good in anything, he has to avail himself to much reading, studying and practising. What often happens to us is that we fail to avail ourselves enough to these things because we get ourselves too busy doing something else.

In verse 59, we find a man who was also busy doing something else and so was not available to Christ. He said, "*Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.*" Now this sounds like a very legitimate excuse. But why then did Jesus reply, "*Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God*"? Was He being unkind or insensitive to the man's needs? Not at all. Let us be careful in understanding the situation. The fact that the man was together with Jesus at this point in

time and not in his own home, shows that his father was probably not dead yet. If his father had already died, he would not have been where Jesus was, but at home, since it is always the Jewish custom, even till today, to bury someone on the very same day that he died.

So what this second prospective disciple was really saying was this, “Lord, please let me wait until my father dies and is buried, and then after that, I will follow you. I cannot be available to you now, but perhaps later on.”

At some time of our lives we may have also done this: times when we know that it is the will of God for us to improve our quiet time with God, or do something about our insufficient knowledge of the Bible, or about those books in the Old Testament that we hardly know about. And we know that God wants us to do something about our lack of prayer and service to Him. But then, at the same time, there are other things in our lives which distract us and call for our attention. So we end up postponing the things we should do, and in effect we tell the Lord to wait until a time when we are free. We put God “on hold”!

A young person enrolls in college or university. When campus life begins he may find it hard to keep up with all his assignments, required reading, writing term papers and preparing for tutorials. And then, in the midst of all that, someone from church approaches him and asks him to help out in some area of service for the Lord. But he says, “I’m sorry, but please excuse me because right now I am just too busy to serve. Maybe later on.”

Then when the exams are over and summer vacation begins, that person approaches him again, but he feels that after all that hard work, he deserves to take a well-earned break. So he decides instead to join a group of friends on an overseas trip. When he gets back from the trip, a friend of his returns from overseas and he feels that he must spend time with him before he leaves again. And so once again he excuses himself from serving the Lord. Then school term begins once more and again he has to concentrate on his studies and so cannot be available. So he says to himself, “After I graduate, I will have more time.”

But after he graduates four things happen: he pursues post-graduate studies, he gets married, has children, and begins to work his way up to the top of the corporate ladder in his profession or business. So he is still not available. Then he tells himself, “Well, when I retire and when all my children are grown up and have their own families, I will definitely have time to serve the Lord.” Retirement finally comes.

But then, he feels tired and looks back at all he has achieved in life and all the wealth he has gained, and says, “I think I deserve at least to enjoy what I have worked so hard for all my life.” So he travels around the world with his spouse for a number of years. When he finally finishes all that he wants to do, he leans on his walking stick and says, “Now I am ready to serve the Lord.” But by this time, he is too old and too tired to be of much good use to the Lord.

Now please don’t laugh at this little scenario I have just given. It is sad and tragic. I hope that you will realise how easy it is to yield to the temptation of making yourself unavailable to do God’s will. What should we do then? How can we keep ourselves available despite doing the other things we need to do?

First of all, please be convinced that there will never be a better time for God’s matters than right now—the present time. No matter how busy you are, be sure to set aside time for the Lord. Your pursuit of living for God in life and practice has to keep going on at the same time as your involvement in other things. You must always maintain a healthy balance between the time you spend for your studies or work and the time you spend for the Lord. I know that this is not an easy thing to do, it does take effort and wisdom, but you need to do it.

Secondly, maintain the right order of priorities. Getting perfect grades are not the most important thing in life, neither are career, marriage, or other relationships, even though we who are Christians ought to do our best to succeed in these things in order to glorify God. But what must be of greater importance to us is the Kingdom of God. This takes priority over everything else, even over important family relationships. When Jesus said, “*Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God,*” He meant that God’s kingdom must at times take priority even over legitimate filial duties. Things like

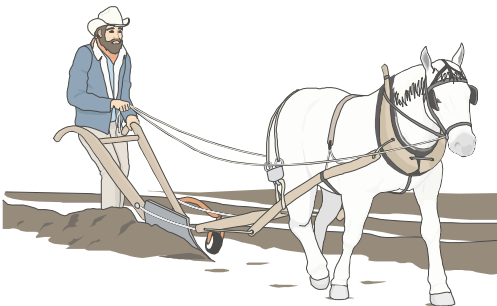
these must never be used as an excuse for not getting ourselves involved in the work of God's Kingdom.

Dear reader, when Christ bids you to follow Him, He means that you should start following Him and doing His will now, and not at your own convenient time.

He wants commitment and availability from you, not in some future time that you are comfortable with, but right now, in the present time. Someone may perhaps say, "This is too hard for me to do. How can I do it?" There is one way that is sure to work: Love the Lord Jesus with all your heart, soul and mind. Then you will be most willing to make yourself available to Him. Isn't it true that no matter how busy we are, we always manage to make time for those we love very much? A young man may sometimes spend hours talking on the phone with the girl he loves. And she in turn may spend a few hours shopping for a gift for him at a shopping mall. If we really love God, therefore, we would gladly make ourselves available to do anything He wants.

III. We Must Be Single-Minded in Doing God's Will

A person will experience great difficulty in doing the will of God if his loyalties are always divided between God and something else. Jesus Himself said that no man can serve two masters (Matt 6:24). Have you ever tried working under two different directors or heads at the same time? It is an extremely difficult and frustrating experience. No matter how hard you work, you can never please both directors at the same time. One of them will always be displeased with what you do to please the other. In the end, the work becomes a terrible mess!



In Luke 9:62: Jesus said, "*No man, having put his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God.*" In saying this, He was really using a farming illustration. If a farmer wants to plough a

straight furrow he must concentrate fully on controlling the direction of the plough. He must keep his eyes looking in front and no where else, otherwise he will start to veer off course. What do you think will happen if he keeps looking back all the time? He will end up with a very crooked or curved furrow. Good ploughing requires single-mindedness.

In the same way, our commitment to do the will of the Lord requires us to be single-minded. Why did Jesus need to emphasise this point to the third prospective disciple? Perhaps it is because our Lord who is omniscient, knows every man's heart.

He probably knew what was in this man's heart, and could see that his loyalties were divided, when the man said, "*Let me go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house.*" Such divided loyalty would very seriously affect his commitment and service. God's kingdom requires nothing less than single-minded, whole-hearted commitment. Half-heartedness and divided loyalties makes a person unfit for promoting God's kingdom and doing His will. Let us ask ourselves, "Am I unfit for promoting God's kingdom? Are my loyalties divided between God and something else?"

The problem with many people is that they often want to have the best of both worlds: they want God's best plans and blessings for their lives and yet they also want the best of all the good things that the world has to offer to them. They want to be successful in God's eyes and they also want to be successful and popular in the eyes of the world. And they can't decide exactly where their loyalties should lie. And so they choose to remain somewhere in between, without wanting to give up either of the two choices.

Sometimes this situation results in living a dual life: Six days a week they seek to do their own will: they live the way the rest of the world does, and their lives are no different from the lives of their non-Christian friends. And then on Sunday they suddenly become totally different: They become transformed into super-spiritual Christians in church, and they seek to do God's will. But its very hard to keep up with this kind of life for long. They overestimate ourselves if they think that they can maintain a full-hearted single-minded service to God while at the same time being in full pursuit of the world's highest

opportunities within their grasp. Something is bound to give way. Very soon they will face a conflict of interests.

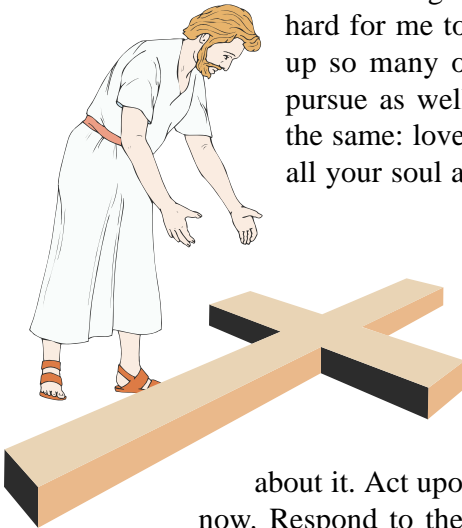
Dear reader, please be careful not to live like that. Be single-minded. Let your loyalties be focussed on just one main pursuit in life. Be like the Apostle Paul who said:

. . . this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (*Phil 3:13-14*).

Paul was a “one-thing person.” King David was also a “one-thing” person, because he wrote in Psalm 27:4,

One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple.

Decide that from this day onward you will subordinate all things in your life to just one thing you want to accomplish: following Christ. Remember what Jesus said in Luke 9:23, “*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.*”



Once again, a person may say, “This is too hard for me to do. How can you ask me to give up so many other things in life that I want to pursue as well?” And once again the answer is the same: love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul and all your mind. If you love Him fully, everything else will fade away in importance. You will then make Him your one and only, single-minded pursuit in life.

If God has spoken to your heart today, don’t just think about it. Act upon it. Be bold to take the right steps now. Respond to these things by seeking to do God’s will rather than your own will. There is just one more thing

that we want to observe in the passage. You may have noticed that the names of the three men are not given in the Bible at all. They remain anonymous and unknown, not like other disciples of Christ whose names are given: Peter, Andrew, James and John. Why are their names not found in God's Word? Because they probably ended up not following Christ and doing the will of God after this. This is a very sad thing, because all three of them started out very well. Each of them had good potential to become committed disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But what about you? Will you end up becoming a committed disciple of Christ? Or will you end up like these three men who remained unknown? What are you going to do with your life?

Chapter 8

The Extent of Consecration: Willing to Die for Christ

Text: Acts 20:17-24

“. . . that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice . . .” (Rom 12:1).

William Shakespeare, the famous English playwright, provides an interesting illustration. In his play entitled *The Merchant of Venice*, a rich man had died and left behind a very large estate and an only daughter, a fair damsel, named Portia. Whoever marries Portia would also inherit his whole estate. But in his will the man stated that any suitor of Portia would first have to pass a simple test to qualify to marry her. He would have to choose one out of three caskets made of different metals: gold, silver and lead.

If the casket chosen by a suitor contained the picture of Portia, this means that he has won the right to marry her. If it does not, he would have to leave immediately. The first suitor was a prince and he chose the golden casket, but Portia's picture was not in it. The second suitor was another prince, and he chose the silver casket which had the inscription on it "He who chooses me will get what he deserves." All he found in it was the picture of a fool, making a funny face.

The third suitor was Basanio, a man who really loved Portia, and he chose the casket made of lead. On the outside of the casket was the inscription: "He who chooses me, must hazard all that he has." When he opened it he found Portia's lovely picture in it and they were married.

The reason why Basanio succeeded where the others had failed, is that he alone was willing to hazard or risk everything he had for the one he loved. The message of this illustration for us is: Are we willing to hazard all that we have for Christ? Are we willing to go to the very limit of our lives, in our consecration?

The Apostle Paul definitely was. After sailing by Ephesus on his way back to Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary journey, Paul came to Miletus and called the elders of the church at Ephesus to come for a meeting with him. In Acts 20:22–24, he tells the elders of Ephesus,

And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

After he left them, he sailed to Palestine and came to the coastal city of Caesarea, which is just a few miles from Jerusalem. Here a Christian prophet named Agabus met him. Acts 21:11–13 says,

And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

Paul then left for Jerusalem, and there he did not die, but he was arrested and later taken to Rome for trial. Later on, after he was sentenced to be executed, he wrote these words to Timothy, still expressing the same willingness to sacrifice his own life for the sake of Christ. In 2 Timothy 4:6–8, he wrote:

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my

course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

Shortly after this, Paul was beheaded by the Roman Emperor Nero. The Apostle Peter was also martyred at about the same time. According to tradition, Peter was crucified upside down. Andrew was crucified on a X-shaped cross at Edessa. Matthew was slain in Ethiopia in AD 60. Mark, the author of the Gospel of Mark, was dragged to pieces by the people of Alexandria in Egypt. Luke was hanged on an olive tree in Greece. Thomas was speared to death in India. And many more believers also chose to suffer and lose their lives rather than to give up their faith in Christ. This has continued throughout the centuries of church history. Some were fed to the lions, others were burned at the stake. During the time of the Spanish Inquisition, many true believers were tortured or hanged because they believed in Christ. More recently, communist nations also persecuted Christians with hard labor, imprisonment and even death.

In China, thousands of Christians are imprisoned—more than in any country in the world—for holding worship, preaching or distributing Bibles without permission. A heavy crush down began in 1996. House Church activities were disrupted and stopped in different parts of China. The heartbreaking news of the arrest of the House Church Christians who were brutally beaten and severely fined, continue to flow out of China since then.

According to an article in the *New York Times* (March 1997), more Christians have died in this century for being Christians than in the first nineteen centuries after the birth of Christ. Eleven countries where Christians are currently enduring great religious persecution are China, Sudan, Pakistan, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, Egypt, Nigeria, Cuba, Laos and Uzbekistan.

While we may marvel at the willingness of these believers to suffer and even to die for the sake of Christ, we must prepare for the possibility that we too may one day have to do the same. In the end times, there will be widespread persecution, perhaps even in countries

where Christians never faced persecution before. Christ foretold this in Matthew 24:7–9,

For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.

One day when persecution comes, it may be your turn to face the choice between death and denying your Lord. What will your response be? Will you be willing to die for Christ? Will you be willing to sacrifice all that you have for Him? Now, before you can say that you are prepared to die for Him, there are three things you should first understand about this sacrifice.

I. The Motivation for Sacrifice: Christ

The motivation for sacrifice should not be anything else but Christ. Some may be willing to sacrifice because they are motivated by the thought of attaining personal glory, the thought of becoming famous or respected, and having their names memorialised in history as martyrs. Brave soldiers sometimes engage in battles because it gives them the chance to become great heroes, for whom future generations will build monuments. But this should not be our motivation.

Some may be willing to go to the very limit of sacrifice for some great leader they love, and some for a famous movie star or entertainer they idolise. When Elvis Presley and John Lennon died, some of their most fanatic fans took their own lives. More recently there have been cult leaders like Jim Jones and David Koresh whose followers sacrificed their lives. Such willingness and fanatic zeal may amaze us, but we ask: is it really worthwhile to give up one's life just because some famous person or leader, who is also a sinner like you and me, has died? Human life is much too valuable to be thrown away like that. It is foolish to lose one's life for something or someone that is not really worthy.

But our Lord Jesus Christ is worthy. He is not just any man. He is the unique only-begotten Son of God, the firstborn of all Creation, He is the eternal Living Word through Whom God created all things. He alone is worthy above all things, of any costly sacrifice, since He is the source of all life itself.

And if Christ has saved us and has become our Lord, then there are three more things that must motivate us to be willing to die for Him. Firstly, our lives rightfully belong to Him. Our lives are no longer our own, but Christ's. We have been bought with His own precious blood. And therefore, if we are called upon to live, then let us live for Him, and if we are ever called upon to die, then let it also be for Him. Secondly, we must remember that Christ has died for us. Jesus sacrificed His own life for our salvation. Dying for Him is not doing something that He Himself would not do for us. If I am willing to die for Christ, I would only be doing what He was willing to do for me.

Thirdly if we have to die for Him, we obtain the privilege of becoming like Him not only in life, but also in death. In Philippians 3:10, the Apostle Paul expressed his desire to know Christ, to know the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His suffering, being made conformable unto His death.

Since our Lord was slain by men for the sake of God's Kingdom, it actually becomes the privilege of all who follow Him to be slain for the same cause, if it is required of us to be so. John 15:20–21 says,

Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me.

1 Peter 2:21 says, "*For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.*" If the Lord so chooses us to glorify Him by suffering persecution for His sake, let us therefore regard it as our great privilege to suffer for Him, and to demonstrate our willingness to suffer for Christ's sake by putting up no resistance at all, but allow ourselves to be afflicted or killed like a lamb being brought to the slaughter.

Having seen what the motivation for sacrifice should be, we can now go on to see how far, or to what extent we should go in our sacrifice.

II. The Extent of Sacrifice: Death

The extent we should be willing to go to is the very end of life itself. No one can go any further than that. Death is the greatest price that anyone can pay, because it means losing the most basic and fundamental thing we need in order to exist in this world and partake of all the experiences that life in this world offers. Life is very precious to us—it must not be given it up easily. Life should always be protected and preserved.

And yet, as precious as life is, there are things that are more precious than life itself. Christ is the source of all life. Without Him life would not exist at all. And the Word of Christ provides the purpose of all life. Without it life would have no meaning at all. The glory of Christ is the object of all life. Without it, life would have no direction at all. Life is not an end in itself. It finds total fulfilment only in Jesus Christ, through Whom and for Whom all things exist.

For this very reason, the Apostle Paul said in Philippians 1:21, “*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*” The thing that mattered most to Paul, whether in life or death, was Christ. And this is why, as we saw earlier on, Paul was not afraid to go to Jerusalem though he knew that suffering and even death for the sake of Christ awaited him there. He said, “*none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself*” (Acts 20:24).

Are you able to say the same thing as Paul? Is Christ more precious to you than life itself? Are you willing to go to the very limit of your existence for His sake? And do you know that Jesus requires you to have such willingness to go to this extent: In the book of Revelation, He says: “*be thou faithful unto death*” (2:10). What this means is that Christ expects each and every one of us to be faithful to Him even to the extent of dying for His sake. In Matthew 10:38–39, He says to us: “*he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He*

that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.”

These are very serious and sobering words to anyone. We cannot take them lightly. Matters involving life and death are always of utmost importance. To most people who live in this world today, thinking about losing one’s life brings the greatest fear. What is it like to die? How does it feel to breathe your last breath, and to close your eyes for the last time? Death is one of the greatest causes for fear in this world. The fear of losing one’s life is one of the greatest driving forces in life. And for this reason, people will usually do anything to avoid death, or to postpone it as far as they possibly can. Because life is precious, millions of dollars are often spent on medicine, health care and nutritious food to preserve life and prevent death.

And yet for you as a Christian, all of these considerations have to be balanced against what your consecration demands. You must be willing even to lose your life for the sake of the Lord. Now this does not mean that you should purposely seek to have yourself killed. What it means is that as you live out your Christian commitment in the place where God has placed you, you must be willing to give anything to do God’s will. And if it does come to the point where you have no other choice but death, in order to do the will of God, then so be it.

Now, our Lord knows that this is not an easy thing at all for us to do. And that is why the Scriptures give so much encouragement to us to help us to cope with situations like that. Let us turn to Revelation 12:9–11,

And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and **they loved not their lives unto the death.**

What this passage prophesies is that the conflict of the ages between God and Satan will finally be won. We will have an important part to play in that victory, and that one of the ways that we will overcome Satan is through our willingness to die for Christ. When we think about that: we realise that the loss of our lives can bring about really wonderful results for all eternity. This thought should encourage us, when the time comes, to be completely willing to make this sacrifice.

III. The Attitude of Sacrifice: Unhesitating Willingness

Our willingness must not be a reluctant nor half-hearted willingness. It should be a full and decisive willingness from our hearts. This alone will glorify Christ. In the passage that we read from Acts, we see how intent Paul was about going to Jerusalem. Everyone tried to talk him out of it, but failed to change his mind. With a resolute, unhesitating willingness Paul was able to say, *“for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus”* (21:13).

There are many famous martyrs who glorified our Lord by such firm willingness to give their lives for Him. The impact they made was so great, that up till today their last words are still remembered and preserved for us. One such martyr was a pastor named Polycarp. Polycarp was from Smyrna, a city in Asia Minor. In his time, the Roman empire was persecuting Christians for refusing to worship the Roman emperor. When Polycarp refused to worship the emperor, he was arrested and taken to the arena to be condemned to death. In the arena, the Roman governor gave him one last chance to escape death. This was Polycarp’s reply: “For 86 years I have been his servant, and he has never done me wrong: how can I blaspheme my King who saved me?” The governor replied: “I have wild beasts. I shall throw you to them, if you don’t change your mind.”

Then Polycarp said, “Call them, we cannot change our mind if it means a change from better to worse.” The governor said, “I’ll have you destroyed by fire, unless you change your mind.” Polycarp answered,

“Your fire will burn only for a time and will soon be extinguished. There is a fire you know nothing about: the fire of the judgment to come and of eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly.”

The governor was amazed and immediately gave orders for Polycarp to be burned alive. Just before the fire was lit, Polycarp prayed “O Father of thy beloved and blessed Son, Jesus Christ. . . . I bless Thee for counting me worthy of this day and hour, that in the number of the martyrs I may partake of Christ’s cup, to the resurrection of eternal life of both soul and body in the imperishability that is the gift of the Holy Spirit” When he finished his prayer, the fire was lit and great flames shot up. What a wonderful testimony!

Now having this kind of willingness is perhaps the hardest part of it all. To be able to make the irrevocable decision of submitting to death without any hesitation at all, for Christ’s sake, is not easy for anyone to do. There are some who may hastily and without thinking, boast today that they are quite willing to die for Christ, but when the situation really comes, they quickly back out of it. Let us be careful to think through the whole thing carefully: whether we really are willing to sacrifice our life for Christ. Even Peter and the other disciples at the Last Supper claimed with heroic spirits that they were most willing to give up their lives:

Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples (*Matt 26:33–35*).

We know all too well what happened after that: When Christ was really arrested, all the disciples left him except for John. Peter, who had been the most outspoken in his boasting, denied that he even knew Christ at all, three times. Please be careful not to repeat the same mistake by hastily boasting that you are most ready to die for your Lord anytime. Carefully count the cost and prayerfully beg the Lord to grant you the strength and courage you need from God to do His will.

And, more important than that, if you want to be willing to die for Christ, you first must be willing to live for Him. If you are not willing

to even live for Christ, how then can you be willing to suffer and die for Him? So settle first the issue of whether you are committed enough to live your life daily for Christ, before you can think of whether you are committed enough to suffer and die for Him. What are you going to do with your life? “Only one life ‘twill soon be past, only what’s done for Christ will last.”

Chapter 9

The Challenge to Consecration: Forsake All and Follow Christ

Text: Luke 5:1-11

*“ . . . present your bodies . . . which is your reasonable service ”
(Rom 12:1).*

This passage of Scripture records one of the earliest miracles that Jesus performed here on earth: the miracle of the draught of fishes. This is the third recorded miracle in the earthly ministry of Christ. It took place when Jesus was starting His first preaching tour in Galilee. And it was an important event, because it was then that four of the closest disciples of Jesus—that is, Peter, James, John and Andrew—were called by Him to full-time discipleship.

Before this event, these four already knew Jesus through the testimony of John the Baptist, and they had started to spend some time with the Lord. But up until then, they were only part-time followers since they still attended to their own fishing business. This miracle of the draught of fishes then became the turning point in their lives, the time when these four men forsook all that they had to become full-time followers of Christ. They literally abandoned their fishing business, their boats and fishing nets. They gave up all that they had, just to give themselves fully to following Christ. What a turning point that was for them. Have you ever come to such a turning point in your life?

My own turning point took place in 1983, when the Lord convicted me to forsake the pursuit of a career in medicine at the National University of Singapore, to serve Him in the full-time ministry. This conviction did not come overnight. It was a conviction that persisted and bothered me for over a year in the midst of my studies. At first I tried to avoid it, because it seemed too drastic a step to take, after all the time and effort that I had put in, and I was also afraid of how friends and family would react if I were to go into full-time service. Nevertheless in December 1983, I could not escape from it anymore and took time to pray about it. And finally with full assurance that this is what God wanted me to do with my life, I stepped out in faith. And I will never forget that turning point. Whenever I feel attracted back to the pursuits of the world I look at that turning point, and say, “I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back.” And my resolve to continue serving the Lord is very much strengthened. It is my prayer that the Lord will somehow use this book to bring someone to such a turning point.

We can see how important this event of Luke 5:1–11 became to these four disciples of Christ mentioned in our text because they were reminded of it again about three years later as recorded in John 21. By that time, Jesus had died on the cross and resurrected from the dead. And the disciples of Christ went back to fishing. In verses 3–7, we observe how similar this event was to the one where the disciples were called to follow Him:

Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing. But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, . . .

Then they all came to shore and met with the Lord.

What a wonderful reminder this must have been to the disciples of the turning point they had experienced three years before. They were in danger of going back to the world, to their old fishing business. The circumstances were almost the same: they had caught no fish all night and when they obeyed Christ's command, they caught a large draught of fishes in their nets. This gentle reminder served to help them renew their resolve to follow Christ. After He left them and ascended to heaven, they never ever went back to fishing but devoted themselves fully to serving the Lord.

As we study the miracle of the draught of fishes, we are going to ask, "What are the things that can lead us to the same kind of turning point the disciples experienced here? What can make us forsake all and follow Jesus?"

The first verse provides the location of this event—the lake of Gennesaret: This is actually just one of the many names for the Sea of Galilee, a large inland harp-shaped lake in the northern part of Israel, about 13 miles long and 8 miles wide. In the Bible it is also called the Sea of Chinnereth and the Sea of Tiberias. This lake became the scene of many miracles of Christ. It was here that Jesus calmed the storm. It was also here that He walked upon the water, after He performed the miracle of feeding the five thousand with just five loaves and two fishes. If you ever visit the Holy Land, be sure to go to the Sea of Galilee, and think of all these wonderful events that took place there. The water is fresh, sweet, sparkling and transparent with fish in abundance. There are still fishermen and fishing boats there and the most common variety of fish that is caught in it is St. Peter's fish.

Because of the abundance of this fish in the Sea of Galilee since ancient times, it became a good source of income to the Jews in Galilee like Simon Peter, his brother Andrew, plus James and John, and their father, Zebedee. These five fishermen had a partnership, a joint fishing business, complete with two fishing boats and nets. They usually did their fishing at night, using a torch to attract the fish to the surface. Fishing was not an easy task, and sometimes despite all the effort put in, no fish were caught, and this is what we see happening in Luke chapter 5. After spending one whole night of fishing, Simon Peter and his

partners had sailed back to shore empty handed, probably feeling very tired and disappointed as they washed their nets.

It was early morning and Jesus was standing on the beach when they came in. But the morning also brought crowds of people who wanted to hear Jesus preaching the Word of God to them. As the crowd grew and grew bigger, it became difficult for our Lord to be heard and many could not see Him. He was lost in the crowd, He was crowded and in danger of being crowded into the water. Some new physical arrangement was definitely needed to facilitate His preaching. But since this was at the seashore, there were no pews and not pulpit from Him to preach from. As our Lord looked around he saw the two fishing boats which belonged to the fishermen disciples. He therefore used the boat which belonged to Simon Peter as a pulpit for His preaching.

Here we can see the very first of three persuasive reasons that will lead us to the turning point of forsaking all and following the Lord.

I. God Will Use Whatever We Yield to Him for His Glory

People are sometimes not willing to forsake or surrender the things they have because they think that they are the only means they have in this world to get gain, to get profit, to get all the things that are important and valuable to them in life. But very often, they find themselves disappointed because the things they cling to so tightly and refuse to give up, do not give them what they expect from them. This was the situation with Simon Peter.

Peter's fishing boat had not brought him the earthly profit he expected from one whole night's hard work of fishing on the sea of Galilee. But now we see what great dividends it was able to reap for God's Kingdom when the Lord used that boat for preaching His life-giving Word to the whole crowd of people. From this, we learn an important lesson: it is best for us not to withhold from the Lord, the things we have. We should rather make everything we have available for the Lord's use, and then these things would find great eternal value in having been used by God to bring glory to Himself.

In Singapore, there has been a lot of talk about enhancing the value of our material assets through costly upgrading programmes. But do you know that there is a much better way to really enhance the value of all your earthly assets? Let God use them, and then they will help to produce results that are of far greater eternal value.

For example, if you own a house, let it be available for holding a regular Bible study or fellowship meeting in your neighbourhood. If you own a car, let it be available to the Lord to ferry children or people to and from church. If you own a piece of property or land, let it be used by the Lord to establish a gospel outreach. If you own a computer, let it be used by the Lord to produce gospel or Bible study material, or as a means for your family to be edified through Bible software. If you have funds that have been sitting for a long time in a bank account, turn them into an interest-free loan to the Lord, to be used by Him for building churches, or Bible colleges.

Invest what you have in the things of God, and you can have the wonderful satisfaction of knowing that the earthly possessions that you have to leave behind one day have at least found very great worth: in the priceless souls that have been saved from eternal death, in the lives that have been transformed into the image of Christ, and in the glory that God has derived for Himself from them.

In the case of Peter who lent his boat to the Lord, he not only had the satisfaction of knowing that his humble little boat had been gloriously used as the Lord's pulpit, Christ also gave payment as an added bonus to Peter after He had finished preaching to the crowd. In verses 4 and 5 of our text, we observe that Peter received a tremendous blessing from the Lord: he got the biggest catch of fish that he and his partners had ever seen in all their years of fishing!

II. A Life of Obedient Trust in God Brings the Greatest Blessings

To follow the Lord is to live in obedient trust in Him. Just as the words of a familiar hymn goes: "What He says we will do. Where He sends we will go. Never fear, only trust and obey." One reason why

believers are sometimes reluctant to forsake all and follow the Lord is that they are afraid of the risk involved. We are worried about what our future will be like if we were to just step out in faith like Abraham, not knowing exactly where we are going. The uncertainty of just trusting in God brings the unsettling feeling that we are no longer in control of our lives, and we don't know where this path will lead us. It is like driving along a road at night where there are no street lights and the car headlights are not working. We can't see what is in front of us. We don't know what is going to happen and that worries us.

But when the Lord calls us to follow Him, He says to us: "Don't worry my child, just trust Me, I know where the road leads and that is enough for you: just follow Me." And the amazing thing is that when we do obey the Lord and trust Him to lead us, we find that everything works out perfectly well. We find that all things do work together for good to them that love God (Rom 8:28). We even experience great and wonderful blessings that we never expected. That was what the fishermen in our passage found when they trusted and obeyed the Lord.

In verse 4, Christ gave them a command to obey: "*Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.*" Now this command would not have seemed to be unreasonable to Simon and his partners had it not been for the fact that this was what they had just spent the whole night doing! And so in their minds, they were expecting the same results as before—no fish. Now they were tired, they were weary and they were naturally afraid to waste more time and energy on more futile work. Would they be willing to launch out again into the deep sea at Christ's command? What if they failed to catch anything again?

This was the moment when they had to overcome their fear of failure by trusting in Christ's command, not knowing what was going to happen. Look at what Peter said in verse 5, "*Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.*" And so with Jesus sitting in the boat, Peter and probably Andrew sailed the boat out into the deep and cast the fishing net into the water.

They were willing to stake everything on the Word of Christ. Would you be willing to do the same? Are you willing to take the Lord at His

word, to do whatever He tells you to do, even if it seems to go against all human reason? Let us learn from Simon Peter, to say, “O Lord, while everything seems to argue against what thou art asking me to do, nevertheless, at Thy Word, I will do it.”

And when this kind of trust leads us to obey the Lord’s word to us, the results can be quite surprising. Look at verses 6 and 7, and see how greatly they were blessed:

And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.

It’s impossible for us to fully imagine the intense emotions that they must have felt when all of this happened. To them it might have seemed as if every fish in the sea of Galilee had heard the Lord’s command and headed right to that spot in the sea, and swam right into the nets. Never had they seen anything like this before. There were fish everywhere, flipping and flapping in the water, in the nets and in the boat. It was a dream come true for these fishermen. Their excitement, their elation, their exultation over this miracle must have known no limits. What tremendous returns their faith in the Word of Christ had brought to them! From then on, there could be no further question about what they should do when Christ told them to do anything at all. They should certainly obey Him.

Dear reader, there is no life more blessed than to live in obedient trust in the Lord. When you follow Christ and take Him at His word, you will find life to be so much more blessed, meaningful, and fulfilling than before. Living in obedient faith in the Lord is like living in a different dimension altogether: God is the One in charge of your life. He knows where to lead you, He knows what will happen to you in the end. That is all you need. There is such perfect peace in fully trusting the Lord. You will be led to say, “I will do whatever He wants Me to do. I will go wherever He wants Me to go. There is nothing at all for me to fear.”

If God calls you today to forsake all and follow Him, do not be afraid to obey Him. Trust Him. He knows what He is doing. You can rest assured that everything will work out well, even beyond your own expectations. And in the end, you will be able to praise Him for all the great blessings that He has brought into your life.

Coming back to our passage in Luke 5, we notice that when the nets brought up such a great multitude of fish, the happy fishermen seemed for a short while to forget, in all their excitement, that it was Jesus who had caused this miraculous catch. And perhaps we would have expected that after getting over this excitement, Simon Peter and the other disciples would then turn to Jesus who was with them in the boat and praise Him for what He has done, or at least to say “Thank you, Lord for giving us so many fish.” But look at verses 8 and 9, and we notice that there was not a single word of praise nor thanks at all given to Jesus. Isn’t this strange? And instead, we find that they were all astonished, and Simon Peter actually wanted Jesus to go away. Why was there such a terribly strange response?

It was because the miracle they had just witnessed was so real and great to them that it brought them to a response that was far beyond gratitude alone. It brought them to realise that the One who was sitting in their boat with them was the sovereign God Himself, the Creator of heaven and earth, the One who made every living creature, and every fish of the sea. God alone has the power and authority to command the fish and they will obey Him instantly, just as all creation submits to His sovereign rule.

And when that realisation dawned upon Peter, he suddenly felt very uncomfortable to be in the presence of Jesus. To Peter, the thought that God was sitting right next to him made him feel utterly unclean, sinful and unworthy. The weight of every sinful



thought, word and deed he had committed became a heavy burden bearing down so hard upon him, that he fell down at the knees of Jesus and said, “*Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.*” Simon Peter was deeply overwhelmed by a sense of God’s holiness.

Dear reader, no matter how righteous and upright you have been, if you were to come face to face with God right now, you too would feel this dreadful sense of your own sinfulness. And it is an awful feeling to stand before God with all your sins fully exposed to His penetrating sight. In the blinding light of God’s perfect holiness, you would just cringe with your own unworthiness, fearing even to look up at Him, and saying, “*Woe is me! for I am undone*” (Isa 6:5) and “*Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.*” Like a candle melting in the hot noonday sun, you would feel your sinful self being consumed by His great light. This is how you would feel in God’s holy presence until God Himself utters those wonderful words, “*fear not, thou art cleansed from all thy sins; thine iniquity is taken away; thy transgressions have been removed as far as the east is from the west!*” (cf Ps 103:12).

And then in gratitude all that you can say is, “What great mercy, what great grace! That God should condescend to cleanse me from all my sins and allow me to stand right here in His presence.” This was the way that Simon Peter might have felt, as he heard the words of Jesus in Luke 5:10, “*Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.*”

“Lord, dost thou mean that thou would really will take me, sinful as I am, to serve Thee?”

“*Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.*”

“But Lord, how can it be? Thy service is too great a privilege for one such as I. I am not worthy to be Thy servant.”

“*Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.*”

We have so far seen two persuasive reasons for us to forsake all and follow Christ. The first is that God will use whatever we yield to Him for His glory. And the second is that a life of obedient trust in God brings the greatest blessings. But now we come to the third and the most persuasive of all reasons.

III. The Grace We Have Received from God Constrains Us to Follow Him

There can be no greater reason for us to forsake all and follow Christ than this one. The Apostle Paul put it this way in 2 Corinthians 5:14, “*For the love of Christ constraineth us . . .*” The mercies of God, that we have considered earlier in this book, must move us deeply to follow Him. The point is this: if the Lord loves you so much that He was willing to give His own life to save you from your sins, how can you not respond to His call to follow Him? If the Lord has given you forgiveness, eternal life and a home with Him in heaven, why should you not be willing to forsake all and follow Him? And if besides all that, the Lord has also given you a blessed close personal relationship with Him, and His promise to be with you always even unto the end of the world, is it too much for you to give Him everything: your life, your soul, your all?

In the minds of Peter, James and John there was apparently no doubt at all about what response such great grace deserves from them. Verse 11 shows us the only reasonable response they could give for having received the grace of being called to be fishers of men despite their unworthiness: “*And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.*” We notice that they did not even bother to take care of selling off or disposing of all the fish they had just caught. Something far more important deserved their wholehearted attention now.

They were no longer going to catch fish anymore, but to catch men. And this would involve a greater miracle than the one they just witnessed. All that one needs to catch fish is a net, but catching men is not so easy. It cannot be done except by the preaching of the Gospel of Christ to sinners whom God has prepared to receive His Word. Every time a sinner is saved, a miracle takes place, for he has been translated from darkness to light, and all heaven rejoices.

We notice also that the disciples “*forsook all, and followed him*” (v 11). They did not retain even a small share of their fishing business as this would compromise their commitment to follow Christ. We had seen

Jesus Himself saying in Luke 9:62, that we must make a clean decisive break in order to follow Him: *“No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God,”* and in Philippians 3:13–14, the Apostle Paul said,

this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.



There are so many portions of Scripture that make it clear to us that when we follow Christ we have to serve Him wholeheartedly, and single-mindedly. And like Peter, James and John, you may be one that Christ is calling now to serve Him fully, saying, *“From henceforth thou shalt catch men. Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”* Will you respond by doing what the disciples did? Will you also forsake all and follow Christ?

“I BESEECH YOU THEREFORE, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

Romans 12:1-2



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