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CHRISTIAN CONSECRATION.

"For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

Phil. 1:21.

There are many people in the world trying to live right. There are more earnest sincere people in the world than most people think. We pass judgement on people by their worst acts instead of their best aspirations. If a man joins the church, and in a few weeks is found in some public sin, the world, and even the church, is likely to brand him as a hypocrite. In some instance he may be, but I am persuaded not in most cases. After nearly thirty years of laboring with people in the church I am fully convinced there are but few hypocrites in the church. Most people who start out to lead a new life are sincere. But many of them find the task bigger than they had counted on. In a little while they grow discouraged, many of them give up hope. But most of these, to the day of their death have a deep seated longing to go back and try it again. To brand these as hypocrites is grossly unjust.

But there are not very many consecrated people in the church. There were not very many in Paul's day, There have never been many in any age of the church. This undoubtedly is the chief reason we have so many failures in the church. A consecrated life is the surest one we can choose. If we go into the Christian life on any lesser plain the discouragements and disappointments are much greater. You never hear of a deeply consecrated heart turning back. Such a

life is too rich and wonderful.

Paul's letter to the Philippians is well suited to the subject of Christian consecration. It is a letter from a consecrated minister to a consecrated church. Of all the saints of church history we can hardly think of one who reached a higher plane of living or a deeper spirit of consecration than Paul. In all the history of noble churches it would be harder to find one of a finer spirit than the church of Philippi. This noble church was the joy of Paul's life. Its devotion, its liberality, its deep spiritual life were a source of deepest joy to this saintly minister.

Paul, being a deeply consecrated man himself, could appreciate a consecrated people. He and the people of Philippi spoke the same language, breathed the same spirit, feasted at the same table. Perhaps that is the reason his letter to the Philippians is so natural and unstrained. Paul found the lofty plane of consecration a good place and longed for others to share it with him. From that sunny height he beckons to all who are Christ's followers. He bids us follow him here as he followed Christ. He says to all, "This is a grand place to live. Come up, brethren, you will like it here. Here you are free from all those petty cares and anxieties that wear a man's life away. Here you are on a plane so lofty that the life that is is blended with the life to come, so that both form one harmonious whole. Here you can say, in all sincerity and earnestness, "O death, where is thy sting, O grave, where is thy victory!" Here poverty and riches are the same.

so that you can abound or suffer need, and it is all one. Here a patched coat or a tattered robe is so bespangled with heaven's purellight that you no longer feel it is cheap or shabby. Here hunger, pain, and weakness disappear. Here you can see the very gates of Heaven."

But Paul does not leave us in the dark as to how to reach this lofty plane of living. He knew that deep consecration is not like a garment,, that you can put on today and off tomorrow. There is no magiacal formula for gaining this great prize. You cannot have it by simply sitting and wishing. All the Christian graces are in reach of the poorest of men, but they all have their price. To be a truly consecrated man is to reach the loftiest plane of life that a man can attain on earth. No one knew better than Paul that the way to this noble height was rugged and steep.

But you never see consecrated people turning back. You never see one with a long sour face. Hatred and envy cannot touch a deeply consecrated life. The only wayythat hatred and envy can leave a sting is when it strikes a kindred chord in our own breast. If you are free from envy envy cannot touch you. If you are free from anger anger can have no power over you. Consecration raises a man above all these things, and these are the things that cause nine-tenths of life's troubles.

It is easy to trace Paul's path to this high plane of living. He started on the road to this experience by deliberately choosing the hard things of life. Any man can reach a higher plane of living by choosing the hard tasks.

A hard job puts metal and fiber into a man's soul. Any man who has reached mature life can look back and see many times when he missed some great prize by dodging the hard places. There are enough hard jobs lying around us to make us all great. But most of us are doing all we can to avoid them.

One of my daughters came home from school one day in tears. In the arrangement of classes she had drawn in unpopular teacher. It was a woman that most of the pupils in High School disliked. No doubt it was the things she had heard that made her dread it so much. She wanted me to call up the Principal at once and see if I could get her transferred. I knew if I could persuade her to stick to the place and not complain it would be a great victory for her. We told her it would be a great venture to stay with this unpopular teacher and win her friendship. We told her she could win any teacher's friendship by genuine politeness and by always coming up with a good lesson. She decided to accept the challenge. In less than a week she came in all radiant with the joy of a great victory. I am sure the teacher was just as happy. The child had overcome a hard task. She had learned one of life's great lessons; how to take it on the chin without blubbering.

Every time you accomplish a hard task you strengthen the moral fiber of your soul. Every time you run away from one you cheat yourself. All of us have enough hard things thrust upon us to make us great if we did not cowardly run away from them. But Paul went out and hunted them up.

Take his first work as an example. Barnabas saw that Antioch was going to be one of the great Christian churches. Knowing the noble spirit of Paul, he brought him down there. In a short time he was one of the leading ministers of that great and growing church. Had he been looking for an easy pleasant field of labor this was one that was almost ideal. Here the people loved him devotedly. Had he chosen he might have been bishop of this church. He would have been well paid and always treated with kindness and consideration. But Paul chose instead of this soft easy place a hard and dangerous missionary journey with small pay and uncertain treatment. He deliberately chose the hard place for himself. In doing this he was only following Christ.

In temporal things as well as spiritual it pays to take the hard things. Tramps, ne'er-do-wells, and beggars, most of them, come to their hard poor lot by shunning the hard things of life. One poor ignorant woman at Waycross, Ga. whose three grown sons were on relief said: "We tried farmin', and couldn't make nothin' at that, then we tried saw-millin', an' couldn't make nothin' at that. Then we moved to Waycross an' got on the 'release', sinne then we've done pretty well."

It pays in dollars and cents to choose the hard things of life. It not only builds a stronger character in us; but it advertises to the world: Here is a man you can depend on. Here is a man who is not afraid of hard places. But Paul arose above all such selfish motives. He carried

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the choice of hard things to the point of deepest consecration. He chose the hard things of life, not for the reward it brought him, but for what the task did to him. As soon as he reaped the reward of his sacrifice he handed it over to some one else and went on to greater sacrifices. He left Antioch to plant a church in Macedonia. As a reward God gave him Philippi, a church greater in some respects than Antioch. But as soon as the church at Philippi was fully established he turned it over to some one else and went on to new and untried fields. And he did this after he had reached the age when a secure and comfortable place is very welcome.

But Paul went further than choosing the hard lean places of labor. He chose suffering when he might have had ease. There is a hallowed beauty about suffering that enriches life as but few things can. Suffering of the right kind takes the dross out of a man's soul and leaves the pure gold. It takes away our pride, increases our patience, and makes us more Christ-like in every way. People who have suffered patiently in a great cause are nearly always deeply consecrated. But it must be the right kind of suffering.

People who foolishly bring suffering on themselves by intemperance and wickedness are never much benefitted by it, unless, by chance, it brings them to repentance. The wicked and the intemperate suffer terribly, but with little profit. Neither does such self-imposed sufferings as flogging, walking on sharp spikes, or any form of cruel self-torture make men good and holy. All such gloomy religions as these were

long ago proven failures. These are all dry wells without one drop of comfort.

The hallowed kind of suffering, that kind that sanctifies and enriches life, is the suffering you bear for some one else. When you love some one so much you had rather share their poverty and want than your own ease and plenty you are in the way of suffering that sanctifies your deepest soul. Dr. Stoves once said of some one he greatly loved, "I wouldn't mind being in jail with you."

When pain and sorrow is some one else's portion and you choose to drink it with them you are on the way to a sanctified life. That is what Christ did. He took the bitter cup of our sins and drank it himself. He was the world in fetters and chains and held out his own royal hands, saying, "Put them on mine."