

## What Is Consecration?

Romans 12:1e

Sermon Transcript by Pastor Ernest O'Neill

What is consecration? "Man's response to God's action." That is the commonly-accepted theological definition. But what is it in our own practical, personal experience? Here is what thousands of people say consecration is. "I was trying to carve out a career for myself, but finally I ended up in a kind of dead-end job. My second marriage was on the rocks, my finances were on the very edge of bankruptcy, and my social life was non-existent. I was so filled with worry and strain at night that I simply could not get to sleep, and so I got into a murderous combination of alcohol and barbiturates that had me on the edge of nervous and physical exhaustion and breakdown. At last I just decided I had to give the whole thing up to God, so I said to him, "Lord, I don't know how to handle this anymore. I'm just going to give up the whole mess to you."

You would probably agree that many people in our society have had that experience and many of them quote that as consecration. Because of the loose way we use the English language, perhaps for many people that is consecration, or it expresses real consecration, but actually if you take those words strictly according to their meaning, that isn't consecration at all; that is desperation or frustration or exasperation with the mess your life is in. It is really just another variation of the old foxhole prayer that a soldier cries out when he is in the foxhole and the bombs are falling upon him. He cries out in desperation because of the absolute hopelessness of his situation. It isn't actually very different from the swear words "My God" that is cried out repeatedly in our society to express an awareness of something that is outside your control. But it isn't consecration, loved ones.

The language of consecration is very different to the language used by that person when he said, "I just decided I would give the whole mess up to God." The language of consecration is not a kind of desperation or exasperation to get the thing somehow off my hands; it is not a pre-occupation with a hopeless circumstance in which I find myself. The words of consecration are the words that express a carefully considered presentation of your own, ordered life to God for his use.

I think you will see that, if you look at this verse that we will study for the last time today. I think you will see how it contrasts with the kind of expression that is so often used in our society and called consecration. Romans 12:1: "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."

Now, you can see that that is the language of a carefully considered presentation of an ordered life to God. It is not the desperate, exasperated cry, "I don't know what to do; the whole thing is on top of me. Lord, you take it."

Now you might say, "But haven't you found what I found and what thousands of us have found, that often when we have cried out in desperation or exasperation or frustration that actually God has answered us." Yes. That is how God initiates anything with so many of us who don't know him. Of course God answers us. He answers us because of Matthew 5:45: "So that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on

the just and on the unjust." God answers foxhole prayers because God extends common grace to all of us in order to preserve our lives--those of us who want to live like him and those of us who don't care about him.

For instance, you don't find that a Christian walks along and the sun shines on him, and a non-Christian walks beside him and is soaking wet from the pouring rain. No, they both get wet. God rains his rain on the just and on the unjust and he extends his providence to all people, both those who know him and want to live like him AND those who don't know him and don't want to live like him. He has promised that he hears all who call upon him, and he does that so that he may have a chance of drawing them deeper to himself. I'm not saying that a foxhole prayer or a cry of desperation may not lead on into real consecration, but it itself is not real consecration.

You notice, for instance, that in people who have had this experience, God's help is only extended as long as the person expresses dependence on God. After they get themselves out of the mess, the independence that has never really been dealt with reasserts itself, and they actually go on their own merry way and God's grace ceases to come upon them. That is one difference between consecration and desperation. The desperation prayer usually sees only a temporary lifting in the life. Eventually the people get back into their own weary, selfish way.

Another distinction between real consecration and that wild expression of desperation is that the desperation prayer is preoccupied with the hopelessness of the circumstances. A person who says, "The whole thing fell upon me and I couldn't do anything, so I thought, 'Well, I can't lose. I'll give it all over to God'"--that person is preoccupied with the hopelessness of his circumstances.

But, do you see that consecration is man's response to God's action, and God's action doesn't concentrate on the circumstances? God's action concentrates on the perverted, twisted self that produced the circumstances. In other words, God is not in the business of flying down from heaven every time you get yourself into a predicament, and then he delivers you from the predicament and flies back up to heaven. God isn't in that business because that would destroy free will on the earth and it would fill the sky. You couldn't have any planes landing anywhere! God doesn't do that kind of thing. God's action dealt with the self that produced the mess of the circumstances.

In other words, God's action which demands our response of consecration does not actually deal so much with the second marriage that is on the rocks as it deals with the self that wanted some human being to provide the friendship that God alone could give. God deals with the self that produced those failed marriages. God does not deal so much with the dead-end job as he deals with the insecure self that was so determined to establish its own security independently of God, that it works its way into a life of boredom and dead-end jobs. God does not deal so much with the non-existent social life that you face at the moment as he deals with the self-centered personality that saw people as somebody to be used for company and friendship and security in the place of God. Consecration as a response to God's action is concerned with something entirely different from the person who is involved in a foxhole prayer.

I would lovingly say to those of you who have got yourselves into that foxhole prayer kind of stuff, "Loved ones, that isn't consecration." I say it kindly and respectfully, "That isn't consecration." I know in our day it is presented as a very holy thing to say. It is not holy; it is just downright sensible. "I'm in trouble; I need help." But it isn't consecration. It may lead on to consecration, but consecration is our response to God's action, and God's action is that act that we have talked about as the greatest recall in history. It is that great moment in eternity when God took you and

me and did away with us in his Son Jesus and untied all the knots that we have tied in our personalities and straightened us up by allowing his Son to rise inside us and stand up and live his life over again in us. That is God's action.

Maybe it would be good to look at the verse just to see it. II Corinthians 5:14: "For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died." That is what God's action was. In other words, God once did come upon the world in a time of chaos, when the circumstances were absolutely chaotic, and his action was recorded in Genesis 6:11: "Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth. And God said to Noah, 'I have determined to make an end of all flesh; for the earth is filled with violence through them; behold I will destroy them with the earth.'"

That is God's answer. He destroys the "them" that created the chaotic circumstances. I sympathize with you. I think it is miserable when we get ourselves into financial difficulties or we get ourselves into these emotional, personal relationships. I agree with you, your heart just breaks. But do you see that God always goes to the heart of the problem, the cause, the "them" that brought that about, the "you" and "me" that brought that about, and deals with us. He puts us in his Son, wipes us out and resurrects us new and clean and changed.

You may say, "Then consecration is presenting this miserable, twisted, insecure self of mine to God, is that it? We present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God?" How can you present to God something that he has destroyed in Jesus? How can you present to God your old, angry selfish, petty self that he has already destroyed in Jesus? Do you see that that has been destroyed? Consecration is not presenting that old, twisted, perverted self to God. No! Consecration is a real belief that that self has been destroyed in Jesus, crucified and done away with; consecration is not presenting that to God. You can't present to God something that he declares he has destroyed in his Son Jesus.

Loved ones, consecration is a great faith and conviction that what I used to be--the me that caused all my problems in the first place--has been done away with and no longer exists. God could not bear the sight of it in his creation any more than he could bear the sight of those people in the time of the flood. He could not bear the sight of my miserable, twisted self and he destroyed it in his son.

You remember what the verse says,--"the Lamb that was slain from before the foundation of the world"--He destroyed that; it no longer exists. You say, "Why does it still have effect in my life?" It is because you believe Satan's lie that it was not destroyed. The effects of it in your life and mine--the fearfulness that we have, the sense of envy that we have, the sense of jealousy, the sense of wanting our own way, exist because we believe Satan's lie that we were not changed and transformed and destroyed and raised again in Jesus. But consecration has nothing to do with that. Consecration is assuming and accepting that that old self has been destroyed in Jesus, and that Jesus' Spirit has come into me and lives inside me, and I now present to God that new, resurrected self.

That is what consecration is. Consecration believes that the old self is dead and gone and presenting that new created being that you now are in Christ. That is what faith is.

This makes sense of a phrase in Romans 12:1. "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of

God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God." That is it. It is not to present yourself--the miserable old self, twisted and envious and jealous and proud and angry. It is not that self. It is the new self, hid with Christ in God. It is Christ in us, the hope of glory. It is a holy and acceptable self as you now exist in Jesus.

Loved ones, I know it is hard to grasp, but do you see that God as he looks at each one of us sees what we are in his Son? That is reality. The way our Creator sees things is the way things are! He is the one that can determine the way things are. When he sees you and me this morning he sees us in his Son, destroyed and raised up new and clean. He sees his Son inside you; that is the self that he sees. That is the self that he wants you in faith to present to him, holy and acceptable to him.

The word "holy" is from the Greek word *hagios*, and it means first of all what God implies when he says, "Be ye holy as I am holy." It means all that God is. How can you present yourself to God just like he is himself if that is the old self you are talking about? You couldn't! There is no way. But if Jesus has come inside you and lives and rises up and wears you as an overcoat and then presents his life to God to live again the kind of life that he lived here on earth in a physical body, then you can see how you can present yourself to God as God himself is. Because it is actually Jesus in you--God himself in you--presenting yourself to God. But that can only be if you really do accept that you have been crucified and raised with Christ and that this is a new self inside you, a new Christ inside you that can do all that Christ did himself on Calvary and afterwards.

The word "holy" means that you are set apart for God. So you present yourself to God: "Lord, I'm here to do whatever you want with me. I'm here not to marry whom I want to marry or get the job I want to get or manage my way through this life. Lord, here I am for your use. I'm setting myself apart from what I used to be for your use, to do whatever you want. Do you want me to go to France, to India, to China? Do you want me here in Minneapolis? Do you want me to work at this or work at that? For your use." That is what it means to set yourself apart to God and to set yourself apart from ordinary uses.

Loved ones, that is where we get into such a mess. We are down here scrabbling. C.S. Lewis said we spend our days making mud pies because we will not lift our eyes and see the beautiful beach with the breakers breaking on the sand. Do you see that we are miserable building our little mud pies? "I'll get this stock piled onto this share and this debenture piled on that share, and this insurance policy piled on that insurance policy. I'll get this wife and this child and this car and this garage and I'll get this job nailed down." We spend our lives as little moles finding our way through the darkness of the underground, instead of accepting that the old self that had to make its own way was crucified with Christ.

Jesus, the great public figure who made the universe, is within us and he can do everything through us. As he stretches out his hand, we stretch out ours. That is what it means to set yourself apart from those miserable, petty uses of the old self to God himself.

The Hebrew word for holiness is *kadosh* and it has the meaning of "healthiness." It means to present yourself as a healthy person to God, seeing yourself objectively from above, looking down on your own life and seeing it from a distance. That is the healthy life; it is a life that transcends pettiness and self-centeredness.

The word "acceptable" is a Greek word, *euairetos*, and it means "fully agreeable" or "well-pleasing" to God. It means you set yourself before God, not just to tread a thin line next to immorality, not

just to walk along the edge of unlawful things. It means to walk as Jesus walks, right in the center of the road of God's will, right in the center of his heart and will, doing not only the things that avoid sin but the things that are well-pleasing to his Father. That is what brings joy.

Joy doesn't come from "I got through the day without losing my temper; that is good!" Joy does not come from "I got through the office day without telling a lie. Good, I am glad." No, it is not that. Joy is letting Jesus have his own life in your life and going to God at the end of the day and doing things that please the Father. What kind of marriage is it if you just avoid shooting each other each day? You know it is no marriage. The fun of the marriage is when you get passed that; you get the guns put away and you start pleasing each other. You think of flowers to buy for each other, presents to give each other or doing little things that will give the other person delight. That is the extra, isn't it? That is the plus.

Now that is what life is meant to be like with our dear Creator, clear away from that old self that could barely keep itself above sin and into the new self that Christ is filling with himself, and presenting that new self to God for his uses. That is what consecration is. It is the only action (you remember we translated it "spiritual worship") it is the only appropriate worship, the only reasonable service in the light of what God has done for us. That is the only reasonable thing. Loved ones, it is a lot easier to fly at thirty thousand feet than to fly at six or seven thousand feet, just missing the tops of the mountains. It is a lot more peaceful and it is a lot more exciting and you can see a lot more.

I would say to you today, this is a grand sacrifice that Jesus has made on Calvary for us, it is a grand work that he has done to destroy you and remake you in his image. It demands a grand response, not a petty response, but a grand acceptance. "Lord, I thank you that I am a changed person this day and that you are in me."

Let us pray.

Dear Father, we see that you do things with a mighty sweep. We see that the Atlantic and Pacific oceans are extravagant in their fullness. We see, Lord, that the mountains, Everest and the Himalayas, are massive and generous. We see the Mississippi river is great sweeps of water. Lord, we see that you do all things on a grand scale. We see, Father, that you did not deal with us in Jesus for our little social problems or our marital problems. You dealt mightily with the miserable self that produced those problems. We thank you that you did.

We thank you that we are crucified with Christ. If Christ died for all, then we did die. That old self is finished and we know longer think of it and you don't want us to bring it before you. Instead you want us to believe we have a new self hid with Christ in God, filled with Jesus. That is the self we present to you today.

Lord, we present our bodies to you as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God which is our reasonable service. Father we ask you to enable Jesus to live his life in us again. No longer will we think of ourselves as us but only as him. Because I have been crucified with Christ, I live, yet not I, but Christ lives within me. This life I live by the faith of the Son of God. Thank you, Lord.

Now the grace of our Lord Jesus, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each of us. Amen.

