

Tom Ruggirello - Consecration

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Thank you, Brother Rolando. I asked the Columbus brethren why they wanted a discourse on consecration when there's no immersion service, and Brother Sean said he didn't think they had any candidates. But the principles are certainly important enough to be reminded of them all the time, and so it really does fit our theme. Right.

One of the themes we've seen all through David's life is the level of his dedication to God, and so it does fit. Let's start by reading this first John, no, John 20:21. Jesus said, as my Father has sent me, even so send I you, and one of the hymns we often sing continues on that.

And it says, you are called to labor unrewarded, to serve unpaid, unloved, unsought, unknown, to bear rebuke, to suffer scorn and scoffing. In a time Jesus may say, I am sending you to toil for me alone, and when you read that, you think, it doesn't sound like much of a calling, does it? On reprint 3547, Brother Russell describes how others may describe the narrow way. These are not his thoughts.

These are the thoughts of others. He says, many of the objections raised to pure and undefiled religion. Some complain that it is too gloomy, joyless a fetter upon the heart and brain, that it drives men from every temple of pleasure, and with a whip of small cords that it posts notice saying, no trespassing here in every field of enjoyment.

Well, I know that if I were to ask every consecrated heart in this room if they would agree with that assessment of true Christianity, I know that none of us would agree with that. To those who don't understand the Christian walk, it might appear to be without rewards and full of sacrifices, and at times the Lord may call us to work alone and to toil for him, and sometimes God even allows painful and heavy burdens into our lives, and he even asks us to change our heart and motives, probably one of the most difficult things, things for a human to do. Jesus said that we would each have a cross to bear.

But I will tell you, brethren, from the personal experience and from the bottom of my heart, and I think you can all relate to this without the slightest hesitation that there is no grander life than what the Lord has called us to. There is no other lifestyle that can approach the life of a truly dedicated Christian. There is no higher purpose that you can devote yourself to. There is no greater good that you can do for your fellow man than to accept the call and become part of the bride of Christ through unreserved consecration. The standard is high, but the rewards are tremendous.

And of course, there is no greater way to honor God than to say to him, I will do whatever you want me to do. The Apostle Paul agrees with that. That's not just my opinion, and he wrote it in Romans 8:18, and there he said, the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

In other words, Paul is saying, there is no suffering that we can endure. There is no sacrifice that we can offer that would make our calling an election. Sure not worth the effort. But you know, Paul was talking about the future, the glory that shall be revealed in us. How about the present?

Is the Christian life really without rewards as the hymn suggested? And I suppose that depends on how you define a reward. There is a vast difference between the world's definition and, and the reality of what true reward is the world. Treasures, financial prosperity, fame, ease, pleasures are

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highly prized.

Excellent jobs with top benefits are a primary reward sought by many people in the world. That's what the hymn is referring to when it says, I send you out unrewarded. It's from the world's viewpoint that those statements appear to be true. Anyone seeking those rewards would be wasting their time looking for them in the narrow way of consecration that would only hamper those pursuits.

In Luke, the 18th chapter, after the rich young ruler left because Jesus asked him to give up his wealth, Jesus said, how hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God. For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, and then in verse 28, the apostle Peter speaks up as he often did, and he describes how he and the other disciples had given up much. He said, lo, we have given all, we have left all and followed thee, and then Jesus answered, verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house or parents or brethren or wife or children for the kingdom of God's sake.

Who shall not receive manifest more manifold, more in this present time and in the world to come, life everlasting. There are rewards in this life that come from walking a consecrated lifestyle, but they're often the treasures of the heart, and that's what we've been talking about all day today. If you value compassion, you'll find it here in the narrow way. If you value love, that.

That's an important part for you. The narrow way is paved with it. It's everywhere. If you love truth, patience, godliness, or brotherly Kindness. You will find them only in the Lord and in those who seek him and want to be like Him.

There's no one else who possesses all those things, and limitless measure. Those are some of the rewards of consecration. To be like clay in the hands of the great potter is really a great reward because he's an artist of the soul. He's making something of us that is valuable and precious and useful.

Developing an understanding of the human heart, which we are being trained to know, is an amazing education that God is God's will, that God will use to help our human family. Let me say that again. Training of the human heart is an amazing education that God will use in helping the human family. The world can't perceive those things when it looks at Christianity, so it often judges Christian life as austere and deprived.

On reprint 5913, Brother Russell quotes a Christian writer of his day who understood the rewards in this life. This is one of my favorite quotes, and it's not even written by Brother Russell, but he endorses the concept. It says, wherever there has been a faithful following of the Lord in a consecrated heart, several things have inevitably followed. Meekness and quietness of spirit become in time the characteristics of the daily life. A submissive acceptance to the will of God as it comes in the hourly events of each day is manifested.

Pliability in the hand of God to do or to suffer all the good pleasure of his will, sweetness under provocation, calmness in the midst of turmoil and bustle, a yielding to the wishes of others and an insensibility to slights and affronts, absence of worry or anxiety, deliverance from care and fear. All these and many other similar graces are invariably found to be the natural outward development of that inward life which is hid with Christ in God, and I read that and I go, wow, that's a lot, and I fall far short of that. But that's the goal.

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The Lord places the goal before us, and he said, this is what we're striving for in you. This is what I'm going to make of you if you continue to be filled with my spirit and look for my leading, and so that gives us a very different perspective than the one who sees Christianity as a gloomy fetter on the heart. The rewards we just read are part of the potential that we can find in the narrow way. If we apply ourselves and we keep our minds open and we keep looking for God's will in our lives, and we keep trying to serve him as best we can.

And I love the point about how often David went to the Lord and asked for direction. I often don't do that. I often make a decision. This is what he wants me doing. Run ahead.

And usually not usually, but a lot of times I hit a brick wall. But what a principle there to seek the Lord's will. In every decision that we make, there is no other calling, no other work, no other place we can find everlasting life. What company can you go for an interview that would say, if you do really good, we're going to give you everlasting life? It's kind of a.

Are you kidding me? Whether it's part of the heavenly calling or the earthly kingdom, our journey towards God's eternal purpose begins when we give him our hearts. If everyone in the world could see that, there would be thousands lined up at our immersion services. But of course, that's the work of the next age, and imagine that there's going to come a time when the thousands, the millions of this world will line up when they see what God has in store for them.

Oh my God, it makes me cry when I think about that. How the Lord deserves that when they finally have their eyes open to see the goodness of God, that He rewards honesty and integrity and faithfulness, that that's his heart, and he's been so misunderstood, and the world will someday ask, how can we serve? How can we give of ourselves to such a God?

That's a thrilling prospect still to come, and it should inspire us to be faithful so we can help the world to that end. But in this age, God has called us to come higher because he's still looking for those who want to someday teach mankind the tremendous benefits of serving God and why he is so worthy of our devotion. When calling individuals to be part of the bride, Jesus was careful in speaking to the multitude. In fact, we're told that without a parable, spoke he not unto them, and in Luke 8:10, Jesus explained why he did that.

He says, unto you disciples is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to others in parables that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand. Now, it would seem strange that Jesus would intentionally hide the truth from the majority of people who heard him speak. But his purpose, of course, was to find a select group of people who wanted to know him, who were willing to ask the questions, who were willing to come to him to learn more.

So what makes that group so special that Jesus would structure his entire teaching method to sift out the majority of Listeners. Paul tells us the answer in First Corinthians 1:26-31. He says, Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards. Not many were influential.

Not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things so that no one may boast before him. Therefore, as it is written, let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.

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Those of us who truly want to serve the Lord should take special notice in what Jesus noticed. The many called to be apostles were, for the most part, uneducated. Now, being educated, therefore, is not a requirement of discipleship, and being uneducated tends to have a humbling effect, and that's the point.

He's looking for humble hearts. But despite being relatively poor, they certainly had their personalities, didn't they? There was Peter who always seemed to say the first thing that came into his mind. I don't know. There was something pure about that, and sometimes he got into trouble for that.

But in his heart there was a humility in a man who could commit all his energies to a certain cause of Christ. We know Peter had an intense loyalty to Jesus. In Matthew 26:35, he said that he would gladly die for Jesus.

He meant that even though later he denied knowing him in his heart, he really meant that. It was just a moment of fear where he denied Jesus. But in his heart, he was truly loyal. Some people struggle to commit to things even when they see it's a worthy cause. Well, Peter wasn't like that.

And it tells us that the Lord wants people who could commit with their whole heart to the cause of Christ. Another person Jesus took notice of was the woman who had the issue of blood. It's in Luke, the eighth chapter. You remember the story. She had been sick for 12 years.

She had used up all her life savings to find a cure, and it just wasn't working. She had been drained both physically and emotionally by her experience. Because of her condition, she was considered unclean and outcast from Jewish society, and when she heard about Jesus and his ability to heal the sick, she came from him, came to him for help, and she demonstrated her faith simply by touching the hem of his garment. That simple faith moved Jesus deeply.

And of course, he was glad to help her. She had a great need, and she believed that Jesus had the answer, and so that's another quality that the Lord is looking for. He wants us to acknowledge our own need for him, the faith in believing that he can fill that need, whatever it is. Remember also what Jesus said in the story of the widow's mite.

It's found in Luke 21. Jesus had been watching those who came to donate their money in the treasury, and he saw the rich men putting in their donations in the treasury in such a way that everyone could see what they were doing, and then he noticed the poor woman quietly casting in her two pennies, and he said that she had given more than all the rich men, because out of true devotion, she gave all that she had, and she wasn't looking for praise.

Why would you be looking for praise if you're only putting in 2 cents? But she considered her donation of those 2 pence an act of worship, and in that, Jesus recognized the sincerity of her heart, that she was a genuine worshiper and she wasn't doing it for any wrong motive.

Another person who was drawn to Jesus was Nicodemus. Now, he was an educated Pharisee, but he was different than the others. He was a deep thinker. He asked questions, and he didn't accept the Pharisaical view of Jesus. He came with honest questions, which Jesus was willing to answer openly because he saw something in Nicodemus that was honest and sincere.

Nicodemus didn't really understand the answers at the time, but he came with honest questions, and I think later he did. Honest questions from sincere hearts is something Jesus and God deeply

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appreciates. So any of you young people, if you have questions about the truth that you don't understand, don't be afraid to ask. You are not expected to believe something because we're just telling you.

But ask questions, study it yourself and prove it yourself, because then your faith will be stronger and it won't be based on what others tell you, and if you do that, your faith will be strengthened. Remember also in Matthew 8 how Jesus was impressed with the faith of a Roman centurion of all people. Here's another exception of someone not being poor or uneducated. This was a man of position and authority.

And yet he understood the reality that his position was relative compared to the power that Jesus possessed, the power that he had witnessed, his power was insignificant, and so that humility, even in evaluating his own position in relation to Jesus, was very important. Jesus also appreciated that this Roman soldier had a heartfelt concern for one of his own servants. That was not typical, apparently, that when you had a servant, they were meant to serve. But this man appreciated when his servant was struggling.

Jesus was also impressed with this man's attitude and his ability to see Jesus in a clearer light than even most of the Jews he was sent to. He said that he had not found so great a faith in all of Israel. Jesus said that about the centurion. It's an amazing statement about a Roman centurion who could look at Jesus differently than the Jews themselves could. So in these examples, we see some of the qualities that our Lord is looking for in all of us.

He wants to see a willingness to commit to the cause of Christ. He wants to see that we understand our deep need for Christ and believe in his ability to fill those needs. He wants to see genuine worship and not worship meant to be seen by others, that it really is from our heart that we can bow down and worship him wherever we are. He wants to see sincere hearts wanting to know the truth, even if it goes against our natural inclinations or what we've been taught. Openness to looking for truth, to asking questions, to being honest, is something that he's not afraid of because he got he has the truth.

And he wants to see sensitivity to the need of others. You know how sensitive he was when he saw someone in dire need, and he wants to see a desire in us for Jesus to bless others, not hoarding the blessings for ourselves. You know, that's one of the great privileges we have, that we can look at the world and want the Lord to bless them. We don't have to feel exclusive like many Christians who think they're going to heaven, but who knows about the rest?

The understanding of the kingdom is a perspective changer for us. It helps us to look at the world in a completely different light, that someday these billions of people who will come back will learn to worship Jehovah, who's so worthy of their worship. These are some of the qualities the Lord is looking for us, and he spoke in parables so the cream would rise to the top, as they say. It was a method of searching for people who were drawn to him with the right questions.

And it's a group that for the most part would not be the ones the world would select to be anything special. But you know that God looks through different eyes. These are the ones who could understand the privilege of being a servant. What person in this world can you go to and say, how would you like to be a servant? The majority say, what?

Why would I ever want that? But when you look at who that service is for, it's. It changes everything.

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On page 560 one of our most holy faith. Brother Russell writes an amazing paragraph about God and it gives us a little perspective of who he is and why we can have such confidence in Him, and I'm sure most of you are familiar with this, but it's always good to quote it. It's simply titled Jehovah. Jehovah.

Our God is the great emperor of the whole universe, and his wisdom, power, goodness and benevolence are abundantly equal to all the responsibility of so exalted an office. The human mind staggers in its efforts to comprehend the mental resources of a being who is able to assume and to bear such responsibility. Think for a moment of the memory that never fails, of the judgment that never errs, of the wisdom that plans for eternity without the possibility of failure. Of the power and skill that can harness even every opposing element, animate and inanimate, and make them all work together for the accomplishment of his great designs.

Of the tireless vigilance which never ceases nor seeks relief from the pressing cares of universal dominion. Whose ear is ever open and who is ever cognizant of all the necessities and active in all the interests of his broad domain. Oh my. That gives you a glimpse of who our Heavenly Father is. There is no one in the universe that we can have more confidence in than in our Heavenly Father.

And when he asks us to do some service or, or make some sacrifice, he will more than compensate us with blessing, some character growth, some bond formed with the brethren. Something may be unseen at the time, but a blessing that will come because the deep desire of his heart is to bless us when we obey Him. Simple formula. Obey and you will be blessed.

One of the precious promises that we learn, that we lean on this promise that says all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to his purpose. Believing that simple statement gives us confidence in the power that we are obeying, knowing that all things will work out for our good. Several years ago I came across a simple story that illustrates this point of trust, and I hope you don't think it's silly. Let me read it to you and tell me what you think later.

It goes like this. It says my daughter was once given a helium filled balloon at Sunday school. It was bright blue and to a two year old it must have seemed almost alive as it danced and floated on the end of the string. She was intrigued by her new toy and she ran through the halls of the church that day, pulling it along behind her, watching it bob brightly in the air above her head. But the inevitable happened.

The balloon finally bumped into the sharp edge of the metal railing and popped with a single loud bang. It burst and fell at her feet. She looked down and saw at the end of the string not a marvelous, bouncing, nearly live balloon, but a forlorn wad of wet blue rubber. The sudden transformation seemed to startle her, but only briefly. She paused for only a second, then happily picked up the shredded rubber, marched cheerfully to where I was standing, and thrust it up at me.

Here, Daddy, she chirped confidently. Fix it. Fix it. A childlike faith in our Heavenly Father's ability is far more realistic than that. I don't know what the Father did, but this little girl's simple, pure confidence in her Father is one that we should have in our Heavenly Father, Jesus said, except we become as little children, we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.

That purity of faith in her Father is the purity of faith we have to have. There is no broken balloon experience in our lives that our Heavenly Father cannot fix.

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In 1 Corinthians 15, the apostle Paul is in the middle of his wonderful treatise on the resurrection of the dead. He talks about the reign of Christ subduing all things, and then the Son himself being subjected under the Father's divine rule, with all things willfully submitted to God. Paul says that God will then be all in all completely reunited with his wayward creation, and after reviewing all these points about the resurrection, Paul says This in verse 29 he says, Otherwise what shall we do which are baptized for the dead? If the dead rise not at all, why are they then baptized for the dead?

And why stand we in jeopardy every hour? Brethren, what practical purpose does your consecration serve beyond your own personal development? Paul tells us there. He says, we're baptized for the dead, and what makes that statement come to life is our understanding of the ransom, the sin offering, and the two salvations.

If we are faithful, we will have a role to play in the blessing of all the families of the earth. Think of that, Paul said. If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise a blessing all the families of the earth, as you know, the promise being referred to as the one God made to Abraham, that in thee and thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Our consecrations began preparing us to help the world of mankind in the coming age. The Church's share in the sin offering reveals why she is called to be the bride of Christ.

It explains why we must experience the same sicknesses the Same trials that are common to man. That understanding gives a purpose to every experience we have in life. If we did not understand these things, the ransom, the sin offering and the two salvations, the purpose of the narrow way would be much more difficult to understand. Why develop compassion in the Church if there's no one in the future who will need compassion? Why develop patience in the Church if she never has to deal with a world of rebellious and stubborn children?

Why make the ability to love her enemies such a high priority in the development of the Church if all her experiences in heaven would be with other saints and with the wonderful angels up there? The understanding of God's plan makes consecration so logical and our trials and life experiences so meaningful. There's no other way to look at it that makes consecration more logical. Being baptized for the dead means that the lessons we learn in the narrow way will help us to be part of a sympathetic and merciful high priesthood. The job of that priesthood will be to nurture, to correct and to educate the world that is unaccustomed to properly worshiping and serving God.

The world generally believes in me first. I come first before anything else, and of course, that's a problem that they have to unlearn. The work of atonement has two essential components. The first, of course, is the ransom, the perfect human life of Jesus, sacrificed as a corresponding price for Adam.

That guarantees that all the dead in Adam will be released from the original curse and raised from the grave. However, when returning from death, every person will still possess their sinful habits. So if another means of covering those future sins were not provided, they would all be condemned to death once again, just as Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden. That secondary provision for those future sins is the sin offering. It consists of the sacrificial offerings of Jesus and the Church during their consecrated lives on earth.

The sin offering of Jesus consisted of the persecution he received from the scribes and Pharisees. It was the emotional pain he experienced when his friend Lazarus died and he truly mourned for his death. There was an emotional outpouring that Jesus had that he related to Lazarus sisters. It was

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the loneliness he felt when his disciples failed to support him in the Garden of Gethsemane because they didn't understand what he was going through. It was the rejection he felt from the general population of Israel, his own people, whom he longed to bless and he would, if they would come to him.

It was a lack of gratitude he experienced from nine of the 10 men who he had cleansed from leprosy it was the trial of a true king before a Roman inferior named Pontius Pilate, who thought he possessed the power of life and death over Jesus. It was the hatred he felt from his enemies, and finally it was the beating, the scourgings, the mocking and the thirst and the pain of the crucifixion that ended his life. All of these experiences would have been unnecessary had there not been a future need for covering the world's sins during the kingdom. The other benefit, of course, was that through a covenant of sacrifice, Jesus was rewarded with immortality.

So, as painful as his sacrifice was, it is bringing and will yet bring tremendous benefits to mankind. Paul tells us in Colossians 1:24 that the church shares in that offering. Speaking of his own part, he said, I am now rejoicing in the sufferings on your account, and I am filling up the remainder of the afflictions of the Anointed One. Brethren like Paul, your sufferings, your trials, your experiences are different from the world, even though they seem very similar. The idea of being unrespected, unsought and unloved are part of your offering for man's future sins that Jesus began.

Paul goes on in verses 26 and 27 of Colossians 1, explaining that it is a great mystery that the Church should be part of Christ as she fills up the experiences of the Anointed Body. Is there legal merit in anything we bring? Of course not. We have no legal merit in our sacrifices. By themselves, our offerings would be worthless, but they become valuable because Christ is the head of the Body.

He has the merit. He makes our offerings valuable and practical. In the age to come, the Christ as head and body will be a mediator between God and man, and under that arrangement, mankind will be shielded from condemnation, from condemnation of justice that Adam experienced during the mediatorial reign. Mankind will learn the meaning of true justice.

They will understand and experience what mercy is all about. They will see love administered to them like never before. They will learn the value of obedience as they compare the blessings of obedience then in God's kingdom to the past suffering and anguish that sin brought because of disobedience. Isn't it exciting to think that we can be a part of blessing this dying world? Our consecrations mark the beginning for us.

This is where God is teaching the teachers.

Had there been only a need for ransom, if somehow mankind could have come back from the grave with pure, perfect characters without the inclination to continue sinning, no further offering for sin would have been necessary, and I suppose God could have miraculously brought them back as perfectly developed people. But that would have altered their characters and that would have violated a principle that God believes in, and that is free will. It is clearly God's desire for mankind to approach him through their own free will. That the love of righteousness comes from man's own heart and not through a miraculous change or through the use of force.

It's the same principle that was in operation in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve were given free choice to obey or to sin, and because of their inexperience, they made the wrong choice, and because free will continues to be a fundamental principle with God, an offering for the future sins of

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the world became necessary. You know, sometimes the best way to explain how a principle works is to look an example of it. Now, in the selection of the Church, the principle of wisdom is thoroughly manifested.

And you think, what wiser selection of a merciful group of teachers could God have made than to select those teachers from among the very ones who were afflicted with the sins of the world? Even Jesus needed to learn obedience through the things he suffered. Now he knew how to be obedient. He had been obedient for eons before coming to earth. But he never had to obey under such difficult circumstances.

The experience on earth taught him how to resist the challenges of disobedience. Likewise, the Church, she will understand how sin can interfere with obedience and character development. Being faithful through all that will make her qualified to teach the world. Remember that the ability to be faithful in adverse circumstances will teach us how to help mankind along those ways the same way. So, brethren, as you walk the narrow way, try to see your trials, your challenges, and the sacrifices you make as your share in the sin offering.

Believe that this experience on earth is helping you to be prepared for your role the priesthood, and by doing that, you will instinctively come to understand the value of your experiences. In that God accepts your offerings for the benefit of the world to come, you are sacrificing for the good of others. The best way for us to help people and restore them to life is by being faithful to our covenant of sacrifice. In Galatians 4, 7, the apostle Paul describes how our relationship with God changed when we consecrated.

He wrote, wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. Now there's an attitude shift in what Paul is saying there, and to illustrate that point, I'd like to read another story. Now, I didn't write down where I got this, so if you recognize it?

Tell me where I got it from. But I thought it was a nice lesson talking about this attitude change. It says, it is as if a woman had been a servant in a house, paid for her work and weekly wages, and under the law of her master, whom she had tried to please, but towards whom her service had been one of duty only. Finally, however, the master offers her his love, and he lifts her up from a place of servitude to be his bride and share his fortunes. At once the whole spirit of her service is changed.

She may perhaps continue to do the same things that she did before, but she does them altogether from a different motive. The old sense of duty is lost in the new sense of love. The cold word master is transformed into loving word, husband. Brethren, when we understand what it means to be a prospective member of the Bride of Christ, then our service takes on a totally different tone. The cross becomes a privilege, a way of demonstrating our love.

But if we view our service as merely done for the expected wages and not as a prospective bride who delights in the love of her betrothed, then we're missing the sweetness of sacrifice for someone we love. That's why Jesus could say, my yoke is easy and my burden is light, because he knew that those who truly had the Lord's spirit would serve him with a sense of joy. Like the servant girl who gained the love of her master and became his bride. It's that transformed attitude that lifts the weight of the cross. In Revelation 21:2, John describes the new Jerusalem as a bride adorned for her husband.

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Now, what bride walks around complaining that her courtship was a big trial to her? Now, that might come later, after they've been married, but in the courtship, you never see that attitude. Courtship is an exciting time. It's one filled with joy and anticipation, and.

And that's how we should look at the short time that we have on this earth. We know how the Heavenly Father treasures his son, and it has taken some 2000 years to find a bride for him. It's an extraordinary privilege that we've been invited to be part of that bride. Brethren, may we each understand in the treasure of the gift that lays before us, brethren, those who have consecrated their lives have chosen the best possible course because God will never abandon us. We will break the blue balloon from time to time.

But our Heavenly Father can fix it. He wants us to come to him often knowing that everything that happens in our life is not random, but by providence. Our life is now hid with Christ as we become part of his body to live a life worthy of the one we worship. They truly deserve our obedience and trust, and again, I pray that each of us can deepen our understanding of who we're dealing with as we continue the work of sanctifying in our lives.

May the Lord help us all to that end.