

“Consecration”

Br. Robert Alexander

Why are we here tonight? Are we here because we want to do something great for the Lord? That is a very important reason. Are we here because we want to serve the Lord? That too is a good reason. Are we here because we want to further the Truth in our lives and in the lives of others? That is an important reason. Are we here because we want to repay the Lord for all that He has done for us? That's a good reason. Are we here because we want to serve the Creator, because we know that we owe this to Him? That's a good reason. But each of these reasons is a secondary reason, for we, each one individually, has experienced something great--we have experienced what Samuel expressed in 1 Sam. 12:23, 24, "I will teach you the good and the right way: only fear the Lord, and serve Him in truth with all your heart: for consider" (and this is the reason why we are here), "what great things He hath done for" us.

"How great things the Lord has done for us!"--as we consider how great things the Lord has done for us, we think back to the very beginning of our lives, when we first realized that the Lord was God. We, up to that point, had seen many wonderful things in life around us--in the physical things of earth and in our environment. Psalm 19, verses 1 to 3 tell us that "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard." We considered the handiwork of God and this led us on to wholesome conclusions.

From the very beginnings of our experiences our faith grew. Slowly, ever so slowly at first, and carefully, the Lord was nurturing faith in us. Finally we were drawn to God, identifying Him as our great Creator, as the source of all life. We were dissatisfied with self. We saw, perhaps, the potentials of the human family, but realized that they could never be achieved by the power of man himself. These were the developments and growth of our faith, until finally we saw Jesus.

As the Apostle Paul tells us in Heb. 2:9, "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man." In the immediate context we learn what this "suffering of death" is to accomplish for man (verses 6 to 8)--"But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him: or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crowned him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the words of thy hands: thou hast put all things in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see NOT

YET all things put under him." We see Jesus as the one through whom all blessings are to be brought to mankind.

We see Jesus at the early age of 12 concerned with his "Father's business." (Luke 2:49) And we see him again, at 30 years of age, setting aside his own perfect human will (in which there was no sin), to take the will of our Heavenly Father as his own. He made a vow of consecration. In Heb. 10:1-10 we are given some of the details concerning this consecration on the part of Jesus. We see Jesus loving God above all else. He did not have all knowledge at consecration, but just enough to know that it was the Lord's will for him to consecrate. We see God's will for him to spend his life to redeem man, and we see Him obedient to that will. We see that in obedience to that will, Jesus came to Jordan to symbolize his consecration to God's will. In denying himself (his own perfect will as a human), Jesus did not have to deny sin in any way, for he had no sin. He had a willingness to sacrifice a perfect human life, the will of a righteous man, to obey the will of His heavenly Father. His own will was dead and God's will in him was alive. And this was symbolized in his baptism.

As he was immersed below the surface of the water it represented the fact that his own will was dead. And as he was brought up out of the water, it represented the fact that God's will in him was alive. And then we see Jesus as spirit-begotten--he had the power, the understanding, the wisdom to grasp spiritual things and spiritual values. These then became his. And we see that the spirit led him into the wilderness to be instructed in righteousness. And we see then, after the instructions in righteousness, the temptations of Satan; and finally his overcoming them in every way; and then his going about the business of serving God and the Kingdom. Luke 4:14-21

In all this, we see Jesus' example of sanctification, because he did every thing to obey the Father's will--to sanctify himself, to set himself aside for the holy service that his baptism, that his consecration meant to him. And then we see in Jesus--in his example--the consecration-invitation--to us. The Scriptures tell us (Heb. 2:10) that God, in bringing "many sons unto glory", he made the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering. Who are those brethren, the brethren that see the invitation to consecration, set by Jesus' example? They are the ones that "saw Jesus" and they see him today also. In Matt. 16:24 we are told that the disciples of Jesus see Him clearly enough to follow His good example. Peter tells us (1 Pet. 2:21), "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow in his footsteps." And in John 1:12, 13 John tells us that Jesus gives us the privilege of being the sons of God, if we would believe in Him and in the power of his life and death.

What is this invitation of consecration which is so clearly seen in Jesus, and which is being so clearly extended to us because of Jesus? How do we know that it is to us? How do we know that we have the privilege, that we may, without presumption, accept an invitation so great, so great as to be given by the Heavenly Father Himself? We must go to the Scriptures to see this, for it is of the natural mind that suggests that it is a presumptuous thing to hope to serve God in this way. The Apostle Paul tells us in 1 Thess. 2:11, 12, "As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you as a father doth his children. That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you (or invited you) unto his kingdom and glory." That doesn't sound presumptuous, does it? Peter had the same feeling of honor and devotion to the Father in accepting such an invitation. In 1 Pet. 2:9 we read, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people: that ye should show forth the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." And again in 2 Tim. 1:9 the apostle is admonishing his beloved son Timothy, "Who hath saved us and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." No there is nothing presumptuous in seeing an invitation and accepting it. And then in Psalms, the psalmist details something very beautiful. And as we consider the picture of the invitation we realize the warmth and tenderness of the invitation. Psalm 50:5 "Gather my saints together unto me, those who have made a covenant with me by sacrifice." And the understanding of the invitation--do we understand it?--yes, we do; we have received it, just as the invitation to a royal marriage is hand-delivered. It gets to the correct party--there can be no mistake. If we have received the invitation we have received it from the heavenly Father--there is no mistake. And an understanding and appreciation of such an invitation means that we have the invitation in front of us. God gives it to only those whom He is inviting. No man taketh it away from us. And we must be careful in our walk of consecration that we let no man take it away from us--not even our old man.

The heart condition of the invited is a condition that the Lord has already recognized. And as we consider our own heart condition we can consider that as far as the flesh is concerned, we are unworthy--we are deficient--we realize over and over again, that if the invitation to consecration depended on us in any way, we would be completely incapable. But as John says in John 4:24 "the Lord is seeking those who worship Him in spirit and in truth."

There is no bargaining with God for we have nothing sufficient to bargain with. There is only a full, free, willing sacrifice on our part--"My son give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways" are the words of Proverbs 23:26. And in Psalm 69:13 we read, "But as for me, my prayer is unto thee O Lord, in an acceptable time: O God, in the multitude of

thy mercy hear me, in the truth of thy salvation." And as Joshua said, "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord."

The Lord has given us this invitation and has cleansed us from all sin and unrighteousness--thus we are free to offer ourselves. We see that our consecration is a giving up of our wills just as in Jesus' case. (John 4:34; 5:30; 6:40; Eph. 4:22-24; Rom. 12:2) And our wills are so much less than that of a perfect man--Jesus was the perfect man--but we give it up just the same. "Jesus said unto them, My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish his work." "I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me."

Brother Russell has beautifully expressed this condition in our own hearts on page 41 of *Tabernacle Shadows* in which in says, "The invitation to the justified believer. . . ." (Tentatively justified believer--supplied by typist.) So there is a covenant with God by which we can fulfill our vows of consecration--it is a covenant of sacrifice, as the Psalmist has said. It is a covenant to be a full copy of our Lord. In Rom. 12:1, 2 the apostle tells us that the mercies of God are so abundant, so generous, that it behooves us in whatever state we are to consecrate. Paul tells us that all consecration is based on our recognition of God's mercies. We clearly recognize the fact that Jesus is our Redeemer. (John 4:34) In Luke 14:26-33 our Lord said that it is not something to be taken lightly--a king before he goes forth to war, or a builder before he attempts to build, first sits down to count the cost. Our own heart attitude is clear and pure; and we rely on the Heavenly Father's generous supply of wisdom, grace, mercy and strength to go on to the very end. We know we have sufficient to erect the building; and we know we have enough to overcome and fight the good fight of faith--yes, the Lord's mercies and generousities are complete; we have no need beyond these.

In Isa. 61:1, 2 we have the keynote of all acceptable sacrifice and that keynote is "the spirit of the Lord." In Matt. 19:21 Jesus answered the question of the young man--"what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" Our Lord told the young man that he should sell all that he had and follow Him. Our covenant of sacrifice is the working out of our desire to serve the Lord more than any other desire that we might have. In Phil. 3:7 to 9 we read, "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the

fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." What a wonderful promise this is that the righteousness we have is by faith provided by God, and not of ourselves!

Ours is not a consecration by impulse; neither is it a consecration by slight allurements. God's purpose in our consecration is to perfect us, to develop us as a New Creation. Why? To bless all the families of the earth! Each of us here has wanted to do some great thing with his life --to spend what little treasure we have for the blessing of others--to help others. "How can I spend my life, is the consideration each one of us has had, and continues to have?" The highest purpose that God has is the New Creation--and we can spend our lives in no better way than for God's purpose--the development of the New Creation. As we develop God's purpose in our lives, we find that we are a blessing and encouragement to others. Our own heart attitude is the first step that must be taken--our desire to consecrate, to love the Lord above all else. And what happens next? The Lord says that our Lord Jesus sees the attitude in our heart and imputes his righteousness to cover all our imperfections. We have been dealing with the Lord by faith and He has been recognizing our desire and our faith as that of a just man. But now he imputes his own merit to us so that now we have something to give to the Heavenly Father. Now under God's law of love we will live--we are free from the law of the condemnation of sin and death, and we live according to the law of the spirit of life--according to the law and the privileges of serving him. Then God begets us with his holy spirit, to be sinless, to be His sons. "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." (James 3:18) We are given the opportunity, the hope, the desire to be of the Divine nature. "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin: for he cannot sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." (1 John 3:9) We have a lively hope according to the Apostle Peter--"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." (1 Pet. 1:3-5) Some translators render it a "living hope". It is a permanent hope, it is a lively hope that instills our very being from day to day--it is not a fad, it is not something that is impetuously or emotionally grasped. It is an invitation that is accepted; and a begetting that encourages us from now on.

But what is the meaning of spirit begetting in us: Well first of all the Scriptures say that we have an understanding of spiritual things. We need not have all knowledge before our spirit begetting, otherwise as our Lord said, there would be no need of the Comforter. The purpose of sending the Holy Spirit is to guide us into all truth. And we see this in

Jesus' life. He was led up into the wilderness to be instructed of the Holy Spirit for forty days. And we have the promise that the Holy Spirit will guide us constantly. (John 14:16, 17, 26) The assurance of sonship is given to us in Rom. 8:11-17, and these are very encouraging and inspiring words to us. We read verses 14 to 17, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." And considering the invitation and the assurance that our Heavenly Father gives us, these Scriptures are constant reassurances and reminders.

The second thing that spirit begetting means to us is that we will appreciate spiritual hopes. We have a desire to appreciate the hope of the High calling. And it is just beginning for those who have made a consecration. But as our daily lives continue, the Holy Spirit shows us the beauty of this hope. It becomes a lively thing to us that enlarges with every passing day. The comprehension of such a wonderful invitation becomes a reality to our minds. And our new minds delight in the enjoyment and consideration and refreshment of the promises. We realize too, by daily comparison, the ephemeral qualities of the earthly hopes and the eternal qualities of the heavenly hopes. And God Himself becomes more real and dear to us, and we call him "Abba Father." Father, Father in a loving confident tone.

The anointing teaches us that we have an unction from our Father that instructs us and reassures us of our calling and our begetting. (1 John 2:20, 27) And we read the apostle's words found in 1 Cor. 2:9-13, "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual." These things are revealed to us as we continue in the Narrow Way. We are sealed with the holy spirit of promise and this is an earnest of our inheritance--"That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom 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, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory." (Eph. 1:12-14)

What a wonderful promise that we could have this hope, to the praise of the glory of the Heavenly Father!

The invitation given to the bride beautifully unfolds in the 45th Psalm verses 10 to 15, "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him. And the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift; even the rich among the people shall entreat thy favour. The king's daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework: the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee. With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought; they shall enter into the king's palace." Yes, we leave our father's house, the house of flesh, and came into the house and family of God. Have we seen the invitation: Have we seen the beauty of the bride? As John says in Rev. 21:9 and 2, "And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife." "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." Is it presumptuous, is it arrogant, is it weak for a bride to consider the invitation of the bridegroom? No. And as the wedding draws closer and the bridegroom shows his favor more and more, this becomes a more beautiful invitation with each day.

The Holy Spirit motivates activity in the Lord's service. The first duty is to know God's will in every affair of life--"Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." (Eph. 5:17) Success is measured by our aliveness to God's will and our deadness to our own will. Secondly the Holy Spirit motivates service in the Lord's service by an industrious use of our talents. We don't burn our possessions simply because we have made a consecration. We use everything we have of our talents, our possessions, everything for the development of the New Creation to bring honor and glory to the name of our Heavenly Father. It means that we will diligently reject all fleshly desires and ambitions: "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." (1 Cor. 9:27) The Holy Spirit motivates activity in the Lord's service by a determination to build the New Creature in oneself and to assist it in others. It deepens our vows to God. It means that we will use study, prayer, and the constant review of our habits, a constant reexamination of our motives whenever we have a consideration on which to make a decision. We will seek opportunities of service--we won't just wait for them.

The apostle tells us about the fruits of the Spirit in Gal. 5:22, 23, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance:

against such there is no law." And Paul gives us a wholesome exhortation in Gal. 6:8-10, "For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption: but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be wary in well doing for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." The Holy Spirit motivates our activity in a whole-hearted discipleship. There is no resting in the middle of the Narrow Way. We not only fail to make progress when we rest in the Narrow Way, but we block the way for somebody else. The bearing of the cross may seem to get heavy, but it will get lighter with the Holy Spirit's understanding of its purpose. The Holy Spirit also motivates us in serving our brethren, primarily in a spiritual sense, and also in a temporal sense. In Jude 20 to 23 we read, "But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And of some have compassion, making a difference; and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh." Again we read in 1 John 3:16, 17, "Hereby perceive we the love of Christ, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" But having the Holy Spirit in our desire to serve others, does not mean that we will neglect our earthly obligations. The Lord has said that if we pay these vows to which we have obligated ourselves then He will accept it as done unto Him. (Luke 6: 34, 35; 1 Cor. 16:2; Eph. 4:28)

But what shall we expect in the Narrow Way? We will expect, as the Scriptures have said in one word, the experiences of sanctification--the setting aside for holy service. It is a wonderful privilege. And as we go day after day, year after year, we realize the greatness of this service. We will expect in our sanctification, trials, many trials, and many many joys. In 1 Thess. 4:3 the Apostle Paul counsels councils us--"For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication. The fornication that the Apostle is admonishing us about there is the violation of the law of the spirit. (Fornication means the violation of the law.) As the law of the spirit guides us into all truth, then these are the things that will develop in us the sanctified condition, the character likeness of Jesus, the quality of jewels that He has said that He is collecting.

Well, let us consider some of the trials first, and then some of the joys. The trials will come from the world, the flesh and the devil. And all of them are set for the purpose of thwarting God's purpose in us. All of them would draw us away from the spirit of life into an interest in the spirit of the flesh. The trials will come because we walk the Narrow Way. What are the trials of the Narrow-Way-saints? 2 Cor. 6:1 to 10 enumerates them.

We won't have time to read all or them, but let's read the last three verses--"By honor and dishonour, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." Who are the deceivers? Who are the unknown? By the standards of the flesh, we are the deceivers, the unknowns. But we are true and well known in the spirit. As dying, by the standards of the flesh, yet we live. As chastened, yet not killed, as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. As poor, but making many rich. As having nothing, and yet possessing all. The trials, and yet joys immeasurable, include adversity in its every form. Along the Narrow Way we are to search for and cultivate the noble qualities that build Christlike characters. And as trials come upon us it is natural to think of them as signs of disfavor from the Lord. That is the natural thing and that is just the reason that it is the wrong way to look at them, because it is the natural way. The beloved, bombastic Apostle Peter counsels us to think it not strange concerning the fiery trials that should try us, but to count it all joy to have a share in Christ's sufferings. And surely, Peter was a good one to give us that advice, wasn't he? He had lots of trials because of his human nature combined with his enthusiasm to serve the Lord. And yet he says don't think it strange. The Lord is perfecting in you the Christlike qualities of character.

The sufferings of Christ are not for our infractions of the Divine law, but are because of our loyalty to it. They are due to our standing against sin and error and hypocrisy. They are for our stand for the purity of the truth and the advancement of peace, and for the love of our brethren, for the perfection and the glorification of our Heavenly Father's name. They are to prove that we love God above all else. We cannot help others in the Kingdom to love God above all else if we have not done that ourselves. So the Heavenly Father is helping us by our trials to see the importance of developing His character under trials. Trials also come as we deny ourselves the pleasures of the flesh for the advancement of the new creature. We find ourselves searching to recognize the values in each occasion, struggling to resist the fleshly temptations and distractions. We find ourselves exhausting our flesh to gain the advantage for the spirit. The trials also provide us the experiences for recognizing the fleshly way of doing things. They provide the opportunities for very practical application of the principles that distinguish between the flesh and the spirit.

Trials also stimulate progress in the narrow way. As we walk along the way, we stumble, falter, make many mistakes. Sometimes we seem to make no progress, leading to discouragement. Other times we seem to make great strides, exhilarating us. But as we review our progress, the development seems slow. There is the lesson of the olive tree to comfort us. It is a very slow-growing tree, producing a very fine grain wood, strong and

durable. The fast-growing redwoods are tall and last a long time. They are beautiful and resist rotting; but they are soft and can not be used for strength as the olive tree can.

Trials also develop the mainspring of our consecration--Faith. At first our trials are small ones, though they often appear large. But they are tailor made to our stage of development, just the degree of trial to prove our present progress and develop the next level of faith. As the Lord helps us to become victorious He sends us a little harder trial, a little more difficult test of our doctrine and conduct. Searching the Bible for the instruction and calling upon Him for help, we overcome the trial and grow stronger in the Lord. Jesus' experiences led him to such great faith that at the very last day of his life he witnessed to Pilate that he had no power against Jesus except it was given him by God. Trials of our faith often involve confusion and the appeal to compromise when the principles of righteousness are involved. Sometimes the situation seems to confuse the principles with our own preferences. From such trials we learn to distinguish principle from preference, if we are rightly exercised. If we don't learn the lessons, then we tend to let our desire cool and our faith weaken.

Trials also produce broken and contrite hearts, And as we become more contrite we come closer to the Lord and He heals and builds. Our dependency on Him grows and His promises mean more and more to us as each experience proves Him, that He opens the windows of heaven to us--"Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." (Mal. 3:10) A heart that is broken and contrite also searches itself in complete honesty realizing its own insufficiency and our need of Christ's robe of righteousness. It leads us to a confession and recognition of our shortcomings. It gains greater insight into the meaning of our sufficiency being of God in Christ. We realize the bondage of the flesh as we discover that we can not do the things that we would do. And as we realize our absolute need of Christ's robe of righteousness, this provides God's guidance for our direction and God's strength for our power in the spirit. And a broken and contrite heart is able to see the progress of God's work of grace in us.

But aside from the trials of the Narrow Way there are many and more rewarding joys of the Narrow Way. The joys come from the daily application of our consecration vows. And in this daily application we will rejoice in the providences and encouragement from the Heavenly Father. We find that He deals with us to develop in us the qualities of patience, perseverance, self-denial, brotherly kindness, gentleness, etc. There will be many lures and traps to distract us from the sanctifying work of our consecration. But we will discover that our Father continues with us as long as we are trying. In each of

these areas He will seek evidences of the right spirit in us in the development of these qualities. Testings will be to prove our complete reliance on Him. He watches for the development and upholding of the truth in our lives. For our consecration is not voluntary if we desire and continue to enjoy the works of the flesh, whether good or evil. It is God's will that we slay the old creature rather than nurture it. The Psalms give us the Lord's direction of Jesus and us in Psalms 37:23 and 34:20. "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord; and he delighteth in his way." "He keepeth all his bones; not one of them is broken." Jesus' reference to the shepherd in John 10:3 assures us of his very special care—"To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice; and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out." And Paul's encouragement of Rom. 8:28 that "all things will work together for our good" reaffirms Psalms 75:6, 7 that it is God who promotes and demotes for the advancement of His people's service to Him. As Jesus expressed it to Pilate, "Thou couldst have no power over me except it be given thee of the Father." The same promise is exercised on our behalf daily, for the one purpose of developing our reliance and character-likeness on Him.

Such reliance requires complete honesty from us. We can, yes must, come to our loving Father and confess all our shortcomings to Him. It is quite natural to find excuses to rationalize or justify our mistakes. But God requires our forthrightness in recognizing our mistakes and confessing them with the request for forgiveness. Such reliance also requires a full reliance on the sufficiency of God. We can do no good thing to honor God by ourselves. We need not only God's grace but direction and strength. We must avoid all unrighteousness and sin. Our utter failure at times, so often proves that we can not do all the things that we would do. So again we are reassured that we need Christ's robe of righteousness. The steps of grace and faith emphasize the chief feature of our faith is our confidence in God. All our experiences are under divine supervision.

The promises that Paul records in Heb. 13:5 and 6 are to you dear brethren--He will never leave thee or forsake thee; surely we do not need to fear what man may do to us. The greatest blessing of life is God's love and His truth. He is known to us in our trials; and becomes dearer to us as a result of them. We do not have the problem of Job who followed God in blind trust. As we consider the things of the earth, and our need of them, we sooner or later begin to realize that the Lord has promised all things that pertain unto life and godliness. Within this context, we realize that only those things that are needful to the making of our calling and election sure are promised by the Lord. They include a lowly position, raiment, home, etc. The abundance above the minimum are needful to us too--not that our flesh should be more comfortable but that we may use the abundance to the advancement of the new creature. We need to be very careful how we use the Lord's gifts, especially those in abundance.

As the daily routines of life pass from day to day we find either one of two things happening. We either grow closer and closer in communion and fellowship with Him, or we grow farther away, producing misery with-in our hearts. The Heavenly Father is merciful and patient in helping us fulfill our obligations to Him as long as we continue to strive to serve Him. Any hint of deceit in our motives will lead Him to sever His relationship with us. Therefore He encourages daily development of the fruits and graces of the Holy Spirit. The same joy set before Jesus is set before us. (Matt. 10:22; Heb. 12:2; 3:13; 2 Cor. 4:17) And as we are considering our consecration, reflectively now, that we are in the Narrow Way, we find that this joy of the eternal weight of Glory so surpasses the trivial quality of our life, there isn't any basis to compare the two. The way is not smooth--it is rough; but it is joyous and pleasant because of the companionship of our Lord. As we keep our eye on the Lord, the stones and gullies in the path go unnoticed. Yes, we even rejoice in tribulation (Rom. 12:12; 2 Cor. 7:4), and we are comforted in tribulation--"Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." 2 Cor. 1:4.

In our daily experiences we have trials; but as we accept them as from the Lord we then can recognize them as indications of our Father's love. And when they are properly received, they work in us to will and to do the Father's good pleasure. (Phil. 2:13) This is where our faith is found to be real rather than simply claimed. True faith will prefer the Lord's arrangements. It will lead us to build character through a constant and absorbing love. This is also where the Lord's provision of our brethren comes in--they are very close and real representatives of our Lord Himself. They are here to encourage us in righteousness and faith. We need them and need to be with them as much as possible. (Heb. 10:25) The joys of the Narrow Way are so precious they transcend the glitter of the temporary temptations of our daily lives, as we keep the promises of God bright before us.

What may we use along the Narrow Way? What are the tools that God has given us to use in the building of this temple stone. There are several. Let us consider a few of them now. Faith is the one most important and most helpful quality we use in fulfilling our consecration. It overcomes all the wiles of the adversary and the temptations of the flesh and the world to compromise our vows. It is the faculty the Lord has given us by which we may stimulate and build greater faith. It accepts the offer of the Holy Spirit of each service opportunity. It allows us to use each opportunity to work diligently on embroidering our wedding garment with concentration and care. It allows us to exercise loyal faithful endurance in adversity.

The promises of the Scriptures are other tools we must use in the fulfilling of our vows of consecration. They are given to us to develop the New Creature in us and the further development of our faith. (Eph. 1:18-23; 2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 1:4) To the extent we find them a joy we will be spending our time studying them and we will spend our extra moments of time meditating on them.

Prayer is also a very important tool of our consecration. It is the one tool by which we may gain entry into the heavenly courts now before our resurrection. It is a means by which we can pay our praise and devotion to our loving Father as well as present our petitions to Him. Having such a great privilege we must come in humility, reverence and earnestness. As we abide in Jesus and come to our Father in Jesus' name He will hear us. (John 15:7) Prayers are the means thus by which we renew our consecration vows daily, thanking the Lord for the great blessings received and requesting forgiveness for our shortcomings. It is the daily use of our sacrifice. It may be either in quiet formal private considerations; and it may be in the midst of the rush and press of a business day when we take a fleeting moment to bow our hearts in our expression of love and loyalty to the Lord. These latter expressions are often brief outpourings of gratitude and thanksgiving and request we offer to the Lord in a fleeting moment of the day. They may find fuller expression in our more formal prayers. This great privilege is not open to the wicked, even in the slightest degree, though they may be well intentioned--"But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee." Psalm 50:16, 17.

The Lord also gives us the opportunities to use all our available talents--the affections of our heart, our aims, ambitions, hopes, our money, our influence, natural or trained talents, our time, etc, are ours to be used as we will, either for the Lord or for self and worldly gain. The Lord and the apostles have set us an extremely clear pattern in their singleness of purpose. Their sole purpose measured everything they did with only on narrow-minded direction--pleasing the Lord, the Heavenly Father. They served Him directly whenever possible, and indirectly at all other times. It involved daily study both of the doctrines and their underlying principles. It involves daily application of those directives in daily conduct. It provides the opportunity to be vigilant in developing the fruits and graces of the Holy Spirit. In Matt. 25:14-30 the Lord gives us the parable of the talents. Each servant had been given at least one talent. The good servants were expected to use their one or several talents for the Lord. The evil servant didn't use his one talent for the Lord, and he was judged as evil. It is important to recognize here that the evil servant didn't either use it for an evil or even for a selfish purpose. If he had used it for an evil or

selfish purpose, the judgment that he was evil would have been obvious. But the point the Lord is making is that through a lack of love for the Lord (fear) the failure to diligently use the talent for the Lord was a serious sin and worthy of the judgment of sin. It is not enough that we withhold our talents from unrighteousness--we must be active, yes, even very active in our use of it for the Lord. If we feel that we don't have enough opportunities we may accept this as a warning that we are not looking hard enough. We may then go to the Lord in prayer for clearer vision. Paul's following of Jesus in the one thing they did was possible in both of them because they limited their objective to only one thing in life. Everything that the necessities of life pressed upon them were all done toward the one objective of pleasing the Lord, of serving Him, of glorifying His standards of righteousness in their every thought, act, ambition and deed. (Phil. 3: 13, 14) Their simplicity, sincerity and selectivity led them both to express their confident expressions-- "It is finished." (Luke 23:46; John 19:30; 17:4) It was their putting God first and themselves last. The putting of God first is not easy, for the natural man, but only for the New Creature. But it is easier than putting self last. Putting self last is more difficult because the natural man is constantly and subtly suggesting that some degree of comfort and ease are O. K, soon to the encroachment of service of the New Creature. It is the problem of careful use of all temporal things only to the extent they serve to develop the New Creature.

But we would be unfair to suggest that there were no trouble and danger areas. There are; and the Scriptures give us generous warnings about them. Dishonesty is the greatest sin of the consecrated. As each of us contemplates his consecration vows, especially the ones symbolizing them tonight, there is no dishonesty in our intention to serve the Lord. And there must never be any dishonesty permitted to creep into our attitudes about our consecration. No hypocrisy is acceptable, though always a temptation. Any reservations in the accepting of our vows or in the execution of full and absolute consecration will void the vow or the value of the deed in the Narrow-Way-walk. The Scriptures say that we are capable of perfect honesty; and it requires all of our careful vigilance in the development of its maturity. Psalm 51:6.

Withholding or reserving any part or any one of our talents is also a danger. Or allowing the responsibility of any part of our consecration to fall to another is a very deceptive danger. Wasting our resources on trivial worldly pursuits is a very natural tendency. However the providing of things needful and decent in the sight of all people has a much lower minimum requirement than the flesh would like us to believe. Recognizing our personal weaknesses is a job we must do early in our Christian walk. And then we must set a watch over them, to keep them in check and to gain greater and greater mastery over them. Then, in addition, we need to set a watch over ourselves to see that any indication

of new weaknesses are recognized as soon as they show up, and are brought into subjection. The dangers are many; and we are not alone in our effort to overcome them for we are on the Lord a side of the conflict. He has promised to assist us. And our plea with the Psalmist (119:12-14) is for the Lord to keep us and to show us the dangers, especially in our hearts. That is the secret brethren--our hearts. It is there that the battle is fought; and it is there that we most need the Lord a help for we are unable to see all the intents of our hearts without the Lord to show them to us. The keeping of the heart means that we are interested only in serving the Lord and humbly desiring Him to show us any deviation as it may enter our heart.

But what of water immersion? We are assembled here for the purpose of symbolizing our full consecration to the Lord. Why is it proper for us to consider baptism as part of that confession? Baptism is the English translation of the Greek word "*baptiso*." It means simply the process of immersion (dipping) submersion and the subsequent emergence. Baptism was a practice in Jesus' time by John the Baptist. He immersed his disciples as an outward sign of repentance from sin. And as important as it was under the Jewish law, it was insignificant compared to the baptism Jesus instituted. For Jesus: disciples, repentance from sin was just the first step signified by baptism. (Acts 19:1-5; 10:48) For Jesus and his disciples:, water immersion signifies complete consecration, complete submersion into the will and preferences of the Heavenly Father. It is distinguished from John's in Matt. 3:11-17. At our Lord's baptism, he was not immersed for the remission or any of his sins, as were John's disciples. His immersion symbolized the complete oneness of his will in the will of the Heavenly Father. And the Father's acceptance of Jesus' consecration was manifested in the giving of His holy spirit, shown in symbol by a dove. (John 1:32-34) That baptism symbolized Jesus' complete immersion into the Father's will for the rest of his life, even unto death. As Jesus said, he was straightened until it was completed--Luke 12:50. So the church's consecration is unto death--it is the complete acceptance of the Father a will instead of their own--from now on to the last breath of life; It is a sacrificial death in the most complete sense (1 Peter 3:21, 22); and it is at the invitation of our Father to be a part of Jesus' baptism. (Acts 2:37-39) In Gal. 3:27 Paul describes baptism as the putting on of Christ. Jesus' baptism came first to the Jewish church at Pentecost (Acts 1:5; 2:1-4) and then to the Gentiles with Cornelius first (Acts 10:44- 48). And there the apostle reminds us that we can't forbid baptism to anyone recognizing the Holy Spirit. Yes, as the Lord sees our consecration, He admonishes us to be baptized, to symbolize our consecration into the will of the Heavenly Father. Acts 8:36-38; 9:17, 18; 22:12-16; Rom. 6:3-5.

As each of us contemplates the vow of consecration, he is reminded of the greatness of the mercies of our Father in providing so great a privilege to us. (Rom. 12:1; Psa. 91:2;

132:12-16; 50:5, 2; Mal. 3:16; Psa. 116:12-19) Therefore let each of us renew his own vows of consecration as we witness this dear one symbolize his consecration to the Father. And let us each vow to assist him in faithfulness as we continue to assist all our brethren in faithfulness in making our calling and election sure. By the Lord's grace we will be faithful, as will he.