

Our Covenant of Sacrifice

*“Gather my saints
together unto me;
those that have
made a covenant
with me by
sacrifice.”*

*“Precious in the
sight of the LORD is
the death of his
saints.”*

*—Psalm 50:5;
116:15*

THESE TEXTS, CONSIDERED

together, bring to our minds two important events in the Christian experience. The first is the time when we saw the Truth, and in it found God’s character and plan revealed so clearly that we were inspired with the desire to do his will. We discerned that God’s ways for

us were infinitely higher than our own, and that to follow these meant a great turning point in our lives. In humility we gave our whole heart to God, and offered ourselves in sacrifice and service to him and his cause from that point forward in our lives, even unto death.—Prov. 23:26; Rom. 12:1

The second notable event in our walk with the Lord is yet to come for those who have not yet entered into death. The Apostle Paul spoke of his soon approach to that day when he said, “I am already being poured out, and the time of my dissolution

has come near. I have maintained the good contest. I have finished the race, I have guarded the faith.” (II Tim. 4:6,7, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*) Having started upon this narrow way of sacrifice, and having seen from the Word of God many of its implications, we recognize that in between the beginning and the ending of our sacrificial walk, a great variety of experiences are to be ours.

Some of these experiences will be of the mountaintop variety, causing us to rejoice exceedingly because of the rich blessings they afford us. We know, too, that there are to be other times in which we will be in the valley of testing, as it were, where our faith and loyalty to God will be on trial. When we enjoy the mountaintop experiences of the Christian life, our overflowing hearts go out to the Lord in prayer, and our meditations upon him and his wondrous works are precious indeed. Thus, these joyful days should help prepare us for the more difficult experiences that, sooner or later, the Lord, in his wisdom, will permit to come to us.

We notice that God often deals with us upon this basis. That is to say, first he may shower us with blessings of joy and peace and fellowship with him and with his people, and thereby build us up in preparation for the testings to come later, and which are calculated to crystallize our growth in Christ-like character. God permits all of these experiences as a part of that which is necessary for us in the carrying out of the terms of our original covenant of sacrifice with him. Though our hearts may at times be weary and heavy laden, yet we should maintain our original desire to surrender everything to the Heavenly Father in order that he

may be our “all in all.” By so doing, in due time we will enter into the fullness of joy which is the blessed portion of all who make their “calling and election sure.”—II Pet. 1:10

EXAMINING OUR CONSECRATION

From this standpoint, therefore, we should realize it was not enough that one day in the past we made a covenant with God by sacrifice. The question is, how is that covenant affecting our lives today? After having experienced a sizable measure of what it involves, and having been blessed with the rich bounties of grace and truth which the Heavenly Father bestows upon those who reverence him, can we say that we are as fully dedicated now as at the beginning? If not, or if we waver in our answer, we must soberly examine our hearts and minds.

It is often profitable for the child of God to put himself through a rigid self-examination. Paul suggests this in I Corinthians 11:31,32, which, according to the *Diaglott* translation, reads, “If, however, we examined ourselves, we should not be judged; but being judged by the Lord, we are corrected, so that we may not be condemned with the world.” It is evident from this that earnest self-examination is not only proper and beneficial, but if practiced by us there may be less need on the Lord’s part to correct us, as otherwise might be the case.

If, on the other hand, we find ourselves being often corrected of the Lord, it may indicate that we have not fully examined ourselves in the light of God’s Word, or have not taken the proper steps to remedy deficiencies which we may have found. In such cases, the Lord may permit certain experiences

which are calculated to help us put aside our own will and to more resolutely carry out his will in our daily lives. If we find ourselves receiving these gentle corrections from the Lord, we should not be discouraged, for they are evidences of his great love for us as his children. (Heb. 12:5-7) Rather, we should be thankful, and accept these with humility and a determination to be properly exercised by them.

When corrections from the Lord come to us, we should recognize them in the proper light. This means we should neither feel sorry for ourselves, nor blame others for the experiences which God has permitted to come to us for our good. It is easy to say that we want to do the Heavenly Father's will, but, at times, this may mean that we are only willing to do his will in our own way. However, if our hearts are sincere, the Lord will give us the necessary experiences to help us fully and completely yield up our own preferences that his will may have free course in our consecrated walk.

In the examination of ourselves, it is necessary that we check our thoughts, words and deeds against the many instructions found in the Bible pertaining to the will of God for his covenant people. We will quote, by way of example, one passage from the Scriptures and note the many ways in which it touches upon the outworking of the divine will in the child of God.

"He [Jesus] died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet

now henceforth know we him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."—II Cor. 5:15-21

In the above passage are several important points concerning the manner in which God's will should be working in our lives:

We should no longer live unto ourselves, but unto Christ Jesus.

We should not view our fellow-brethren according to the flesh.

As New Creatures in Christ, we are to remember that old things have passed away, and all things have become new.

God has committed to us the ministry and word of reconciliation.

We are to be ambassadors for Christ.

AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST

In the foregoing verses, one of the outstanding statements is that "we are ambassadors for Christ." Probably we never will be able to fully realize the responsibility of those who take the name of the

Lord, and who undertake to be his ambassadors. It is a sacred obligation which can be fulfilled only with divine help. Seeking to be Christ's ambassadors, we should be extremely careful in every thought, word and deed. We reflect either credit or discredit to him in all that we say and do.

As ambassadors of the Lord, we are commissioned to speak the Truth in his name—that is, the Word of truth found in the Bible. God's Word should be spoken in a straightforward manner, in love, and out of a pure heart. It should not be spoken with exaggeration nor with sarcasm. The ultra-dramatic Truth more impressive. The Scriptures themselves, spoken in simplicity, sincerity and tolerance, will accomplish all that God desires, and all worldly methods that are used contrary to the divine will are bound to detract from the message rather than to add to it.

We should remember the text in Isaiah which declares, "Come now, and let us reason together." (Isa. 1:18) With this admonition in mind, we should see to it that our presentation of the message of Truth is from the standpoint of reason, and is guided by the spirit of the Lord. Some methods of presenting God's Word may temporarily attract more hearers, but they generally do not draw those who are earnestly seeking to know the riches of the Gospel message. Thus we see that in our desire to do the Lord's will in the matter of our ambassadorship, it will be necessary to conduct our share in the ministry of God's Word in the proper manner, even if it may tend to hamper what we might consider to be a more effective method of individual expression.

THE LORD'S WAY OR OUR WAY?

There can be a tendency to want to do the Lord's work in our own way. This has been more or less true of all God's people down through the ages, and is one of the weaknesses of the flesh against which it is necessary to continuously struggle. Moses, for example, sometimes wanted to do the Lord's work in his own way. God instructed him to go to Pharaoh, and Moses raised objections based on his own ideas, even though he desired in his heart to serve God faithfully. While Moses found it necessary to struggle against these tendencies in his service to the Lord, nevertheless because of his loyal heart condition, it is recorded of him that he was "faithful in all his house."—Heb. 3:5

This should be encouraging to us, because just as Moses was faithful, we can be likewise, even though we do not always succeed in getting the best of our stubbornness, or of controlling the desire to do things our own way. We should, however, always be on the alert to combat these tendencies in our flesh, and never yield willingly to any suggestions that may be contrary to the will of God as it is expressed in Christ Jesus, our perfect pattern.

In the New Testament we have another instructive example of one who, at times, seemed to want to do the Lord's will in his own way—namely, Peter. God gave Peter a wonderful vision, emphasizing the fact that the Gentiles coming into the Gospel arrangement through Christ were to be considered clean. Hence, they would be acceptable to God, even as the Jews. Yet we find that Peter did not fully benefit from this divinely given instruction as he should have, with the result that it became necessary for

Paul to rebuke him. (Acts 10:9-48; Gal. 2:11-14) While this rebuke to Peter came through the Apostle Paul, it was actually from the Lord, and it would not have been necessary had Peter more quickly applied the instructions and lessons which God had given him.

THEN AND NOW

When we first dedicated ourselves to the Lord, how anxious we were to please him in all things! Is that same zeal in our hearts today? Do we need only a glance from the Lord, as it were, in order that we may be quick to fall in line with whatever his will may be concerning us? Many things come up in our daily experiences as a Christian to distract us from that which should be the chief thing in our life. For this reason it is necessary to continually look to the Lord and to be encouraged by his promises. Otherwise, we are quite liable to become “weary in well doing.”—Gal. 6:9

What does our consecration mean to us today? This is a question that each of us must answer, because it has to do with our individual relationship with God, and our eternal standing before him. In pondering this question, let us remember that our consecration was to do the Lord’s will, and that his will for us is expressed in his Word. Remembering this, we will not cast away, nor consider unimportant, anything in the Scriptures which has a bearing upon the manner in which we serve him.

PRESENT RESPONSIBILITIES

God holds us responsible for whatever measure of understanding he has revealed to us through his Word, for it is through this awareness that he makes known to us his will. It is vital that we strive to be

faithful to all of the general principles of righteousness given us in the Bible. In addition, however, we must seek to know and understand the Lord's will as it may more specifically apply to the time in which we are now living, and to circumstances and conditions which may be unique to the present hour.

If our consecration is as real to us today as when first we made it, the evidence thereof will be that we will consider important that which God considers important. It means that we will not be seeking a way to side-step the responsibilities imposed upon us by the knowledge of his will. Rather, we will be zealous in facing and meeting each day the responsibilities of our consecration, realizing that as we look to him for grace to help in time of need, he will give us strength to carry on faithfully to the end of our earthly walk.

The responsibilities placed upon us by the divine will are a matter between ourselves and the Lord. Let us not suppose that by taking a course which will please others with whom we are associated, even our brethren in Christ, that this will necessarily be pleasing to the Lord in all cases. It is true, of course, that to the extent each one in a group of brethren is determined to obey the Lord's will, they will find themselves more and more in harmony with each other, and rejoicing in the same glorious truth and the same blessed privilege of sacrifice and service. Nevertheless, it is our responsibility as individuals to do that which we have learned to be God's will for us, even in cases when others may think we are wrong.

In seeking to be faithful to God, we are not to compare our efforts with those of others. We might

suppose that, on the whole, we are doing as well as they, and then mistakenly conclude that this means we are fulfilling the terms of our consecration. The Lord, who reads the hearts of all his people, knows what each individual is able to render in the way of service and devotion to him. We cannot read the hearts of others, nor know all their abilities or limitations. Therefore we are not to compare our own standing before the Lord with what may outwardly appear to be the standing of others. Jesus commended Mary of Bethany because she had “done what she could.” (Mark 14:8; John 12:1-8) He did not commend her because she had done what Martha could do. Mary had been faithful herself, and because of this, received the Master’s commendation. It was Martha’s responsibility also to be faithful in her particular service to the Master, and it is our responsibility as individuals to do zealously what we can in the carrying out of the divine will for us.

PAST MISTAKES SHOULD NOT DISCOURAGE

While we should remember our past experiences with a view of drawing lessons which will help us to be more faithful in the future, we should not permit Satan to discourage us simply upon the grounds that we have made mistakes. Mistakes should humble us, but also teach us so that we give greater diligence in searching out and doing God’s will. However, mistakes should never be permitted to discourage us. One important lesson we should learn from our shortcomings is the necessity of leaning more fully upon the Heavenly Father, and to depend increasingly upon his strength, rather than our own. Indeed, a mistake which has helped

to impress upon us a greater need of divine assistance can be considered a rich blessing.

Mistakes also help to prevent us from lapsing into a self-satisfied condition. Such an attitude may lead to spiritual lethargy, which is unhealthy indeed, and is certain, sooner or later, to lead to serious difficulties in the Christian life, if not corrected. The Scriptures declare, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." (I Cor. 10:12) Indeed, a small stumble in the way of sacrifice may be a blessing in disguise, as it might serve to return us to the proper path, and help us to avoid a greater "fall" later on.

Let us not think of the consecrated life as we would that of a worldly career, nor view it as something which may afford an opportunity to satisfy some long-cherished desire of the flesh. An individual once stated that when he learned that it was not necessary to go through college in order to be a minister, he felt that at last a long-cherished desire of his earlier life could be realized. He was, without realizing it, interpreting the satisfaction of his own fleshly ambition to be a minister as evidence of the Lord's blessing. Let us watch the desires of our flesh that they not be permitted to influence our interpretation of God's will for us, and thus lead us into paths which will not bring glory to him.

DEATH OF SELF-WILL

In meditating upon the foregoing thoughts as they apply to the endeavors to carry out the terms of our consecration, it is apparent that one of the main issues at stake is the extent to which our Christian walk results in the death of self-will. Such crucifixion of

human desires is genuine if it leads to the full sacrifice of all our fleshly interests as joint-sacrificers with the Master. We are to be “planted together” in the likeness of Jesus’ death. (Rom. 6:5) This was, first of all, a death of his own will, and the acceptance instead of the will of his Father. It was the “delight” to do God’s will which was written of Jesus in the “volume of the book,” and it was the complete death of his own will that finally led to the Master’s faithfulness, even unto death.—Ps. 40:7,8; Heb. 10:7

It is both the death of our will, as well as the eventual death of our body, that constitutes the ultimate fulfillment of our consecration vows. It is this to which the psalmist refers when he writes in the second of our opening texts, “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.” Thus seen, our covenant with the Lord by sacrifice will not be fulfilled until it is completed in actual death. How important it is, therefore, that we daily scrutinize our thoughts and our heart intentions, in order that we may be sure that having started in the way of sacrifice, we are still zealously pressing on in the same narrow path, and taking each step as it is indicated to us by the footprints of the Master who has gone before.

Having made this consecration to the Lord, we are now to be fully engaged in doing the divine will as expressed in the instructions that come to us from the Father through his Son, as recorded in the Scriptures. It is through the keeping of this Word of truth that our love for the Heavenly Father, for his Son, and for the brethren, is manifested.

May the following words of Jesus be a constant reminder to us of the “covenant by sacrifice” we have

made with God, and the tremendous privileges attached thereto. "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. ... If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. ... The word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me."—John 14:21-24 ■