

CONSECRATION AND DEDICATION

The Advice:

Always live a consecrated life at home and abroad so no one can justly think or speak of you as a hypocrite.

Examine yourself occasionally and see if you are in the faith.

Don't yield to discouragement or despondency.

Be cheerful and happy and try to make others the same.

INTRODUCTION

Our Advice to Members gives some pointers on living successful, well-rounded Christian lives. These pointers are not the popular concepts from the positive thinking camp that is making the rounds today, but are practical applications of biblical principles from a common sense approach. These pointers fit into four main groups: (1) Living a consecrated life by total submission to God's will; (2) Self-examination on a regular basis; (3) Resisting discouragement which drags us down and renders us unfruitful in our work for God; and (4) Maintaining a cheerful, happy attitude which will boost our overall effectiveness and witness in the work of the Lord.

On the surface it might appear that those who gave us this Advice merely desired that we have a pleasant, trial-free existence. While this may be partly true, the real benefit goes much deeper. Scriptural principles come into play which enhance the whole spectrum of our Christian lives and service to God. For example, we are not advised to be cheerful just so that we will feel good and not be gloomy or grumpy. A truly cheerful disposition will cause us to be content in what God is doing in our lives. This makes for greater results in our service for Him. As we examine these points of advice today, may we each glean a better awareness that will help us move a little closer to our goal of biblical perfection.

Golden Truth (Psa. 24:3, 4)

Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place?

He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.

LESSON EXPOSITION

I. A Consecrated Life

(Col. 3:3)

For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

Consecration is the act of setting apart or devoting oneself to a sacred use or office. It is becoming dedicated to God. When we become Christians we are dead to the world and are alive in Christ. Our lives have been changed from our selfish nature to a holy nature that seeks after the will and purpose of God. We are no longer our own. We have been bought with a price—that price is the precious blood of Jesus. Therefore, we are servants of His and no longer our own. Our lives have, at that point, become consecrated and dedicated to the service and will of God.

Our Advice tells us to live this lifestyle at all times, at home and away from home, so that others will not have occasion to think or speak of us as being hypocrites. Originally the word, *hypocrite* was the term to describe an actor on stage or in the theater. The actors represented someone whom they, themselves, were not. The term, *hypocrite* today carries a similar meaning inasmuch as it applies to anyone who lives a pretentious lifestyle without having the real bill of goods. It is generally applied to self-centered folks who want to pass themselves off as being a Christian.

Those who are not completely sold out to God and are not living consecrated lives are candidates for the title of hypocrite. If our lives are hid with Christ in God, we will have no need to pretend because the Spirit of God in us will cause us to be real.

II. Self Examination

(1Cor. 11:31)

For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.

A wise businessman or woman will occasionally take inventory of his or her business to be sure that all is in order. Those who do not, run the risk of failing in business. Our business of living a Christian life is the greatest business of all. Should not we, also, take inventory of our spiritual lives to be sure that all is in order between ourselves and God? Jesus made the statement once that “...*the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light*” (Luke 16:8). Those in a secular business will go to great extents to research, study, and test market applications to ensure that their business succeeds. Many times the average Christian seems content to coast along his merry way, believing that everything will be alright somehow. The wise Christian will take the Word of God to heart and examine himself occasionally to make sure that something has not slipped along the way. Those who will do this

consistently will find that this is indeed good business.

There has, at times, been evidence of a fallacy among us that we should be concerned about self-examination only when we are having a communion service. It is very true that the Scriptures tell us to examine ourselves at that particular time, for that is a very serious moment in our lives, but let us not rely only on that sparse examination to be sufficient for our on-going walk with the Lord. Satan would love to deceive us into accepting the status quo while neglecting to "... give diligence to make your calling and election sure..." (2 Peter 1:10). Self-examination is an on-going process that should take place on a daily basis. Our judging of ourselves causes us to see our own short-comings, which will help us in overcoming them. As long as we practice this scriptural advice, we will have no need of correction from others.

III. Discouraging Discouragement

(John 16:33)

These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

While Jesus walked with His disciples, He taught them the meaning of Scriptures pertaining to His death and the fact that He

must one day leave them. This discouraged them greatly. He encouraged them to have peace by being of good cheer and understanding the Word that He spoke to them. He overcame the world, and He promised them (and us) overcoming power as well. This promise should encourage us to keep going on, expecting a good end.

David was a man after God's own heart. Many times he experienced troubles even to the point of endangerment of his life. He encouraged himself in the Lord (1 Sam. 30:6). His heart sent up a praise to God which caused him to be encouraged in the midst of his greatest troubles. Someone said that we should be like the tea kettle. When we are up to our neck in hot water, we should sing! Evidently, this is what David did and it worked for him. A praise in our hearts will help us to quiet our discouragements and fears and renew our faith and confidence in God to take us through.

IV. The Positive Virtues of Happiness and Cheerfulness

A. HAPPINESS

(Prov. 17:22)

A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.

The condition of our hearts determines our outlook on life in general. Broken spirits or

discouraged hearts will cause us to have a negative outlook and will affect our attitude and the resourcefulness of our lives. A. J. Tomlinson had a slogan that he often repeated wherever he traveled. He said, "There is more in you; put it into operation for The Church of God." Truly, there is more worth and strength in us than Satan would like for us to believe. The prophet Isaiah said: "*Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.*" (Isa. 26:3). Let us not doubt the potential that God has given us. Rather, let us stir it up by being of cheerful hearts and attitudes that will bring peace. When peace reigns in our hearts, we are able to accomplish more for God because our trust in Him is more secure.

B. CONTENTMENT

(1 Tim. 6:6)

But godliness with contentment is great gain.

To be content is to be satisfied. The only way to be truly satisfied is to live a godly lifestyle. Solomon said in Ecclesiastes, chapter one and verse eight that, "*...the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.*" In the natural state, the world is never satisfied. It seems that the more people see, the more they want. The more they obtain, the more they feel they must pos-

sess. There seems to be no end to worldly desires. Paul draws our attention to something far greater, and that is godly contentment. He said, "*...godliness with contentment is great gain.*" Those who learn this simple truth are much farther ahead in life. Paul said that he had learned to be content in whatever state he found himself. He also encouraged us to be content with food and raiment and with such things that we have. He had learned the secret to a well adjusted Christian life—to live within the bounds of godly contentment, and he taught us to do the same. Godly contentment will bring us into a state of being "cheerful and happy" as our Advice admonishes, and this peaceful state will cause us to "try to make others the same."

CONCLUSION

There are many rewards of living a consecrated life. Consecration brings us into a close communion with Christ; causes us to develop trust, confidence and faith in God; relieves us of fear and doubt; and gives us godly peace and contentment which makes us cheerful and happy. But the greater reward, if we continue in a consecrated lifestyle, is eternal life and happiness with the Lord when this earthly life is over.

Consecration requires a definite effort on our part. There must be a desire to be wholly committed

to God. This desire springs from a spiritual thirst within the heart and not from the natural blessings which one receives. When we espouse this desire, we must cultivate it to fruition. The multitude followed Jesus for the natural blessings that He bestowed. He told them, *“Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.”* He went on to say, *“Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat*

which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed” (John 6:27). They did not understand the principle of *“godliness with contentment is great gain.”* Where there was no physical blessing, there was no happiness. May we learn this biblical principle and not hitch our wagon to the falling star of natural pursuits, but rather to the spiritual star of faith, trust, and contentment in God alone!