

## Article 2 Consecration

The Bible is clear that holiness depends on God's call—God's choosing. Many things, such as the land of Israel, the people of Israel, and the Sabbath are, in the Old Testament, holy because God has chosen them to stand in a special relation to God. The church, likewise, is holy because God has called it to be the body of Christ and the bride of Christ.

But God's call is only one aspect of holiness. While it is true that there is no holiness without God's call upon us, there is also no holiness without our faithful response. This response takes the form of our consecration to God and the life that results from consecration, a life of righteous obedience. So, while the land and people of Israel were holy because they were God's special possession, Israel was required to consecrate itself and its land to God. Otherwise, it would lose its holy character, would be desecrated, and thus would become like the other nations. That is why God commanded the Israelites to consecrate themselves before their encounter with God at Sinai (Ex. 19:10-15). It was not enough that Israel was holy by virtue of being called and chosen. Israelites had to match this holiness with an act of consecration. Only then was their holiness complete and only then were they qualified to enter into the holy presence of God.

The Sabbath provides a similar illustration. In the act of creation God blessed and sanctified the Sabbath. In other words, God chose it as a special day to commemorate the completion of creation (Genesis 1:2-3). As chosen, the Sabbath stood in a special relation to God and was holy. But Israel was also obliged to keep the Sabbath holy by refraining from work (Exodus 20:8-11). When Israel ignored the Sabbath and treated it like the other days, it reversed the Sabbath's consecration. The Sabbath was then treated as common and lacking any special relation to God.

These passages from the Old Testament show us that consecration means accepting and affirming God's call upon us. We allow ourselves to be drawn into a special relation to the holy God, a relation in which we become God's possession just as, in the Old Testament, Israel is God's possession. This sense of consecration as a response to God's call is expressed in 1 Peter: "Like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood" (2:5). Because of God's call we in the church *are* a holy priesthood; however, in response to this call, we must become a holy priesthood by allowing God to shape us into a spiritual house.

Other aspects of consecration are set forth in Romans 12:1: "I appeal to you, therefore . . . to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." This verse is especially important for several reasons. First, it reminds us that consecration is a response to God's call and grace. That is the meaning of "therefore" in this verse. We are to present ourselves to God because of all that God has done for us, as described in the first 11 chapters of Romans. Second, it declares that holiness requires our decision and our response to God: we are to *present* ourselves. Third, this verse shows us that consecration is an act of giving ourselves so completely to God that we are like animal sacrifices. A sacrificial animal no longer has a life of its own. It has lost its life and been taken out of its natural environment. As a sacrifice, it is good for one thing only, namely as a means of worshiping God. Romans 12:1 states that our consecration means that we are to live as sacrificial animals. We have lost our former lives. We have been taken from our former ways of living. And we are now good for only one thing—the praise and worship of God. To be holy, then, is to exist only for the sake of worshiping God.

It is important to note that, unlike the sacrifice of an animal, our consecration is not something that,

once done, guarantees a permanent relation to God. Once the animal is sacrificed, it cannot return to its former life. However, although “the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom 11:29), our holiness is not necessarily a permanent state. On the contrary, just as we become holy by an act of consecration so we can fall outside the holy relation to God by an act of de-consecration. Unlike the sacrificial animal, we can return to our former lives. This return may result from a dramatic, sinful deed by which we decisively turn our backs on God’s grace. Or it may consist in a series of small, subtle acts by which we gradually drift away from God and thus slowly step out of the life of holiness. This is why Deuteronomy frequently urges Israel to remember God’s gracious acts. The danger was not only that Israel would sin in a great and obvious way but also that Israel would become preoccupied with the cares and routines of life and would slowly forget God. Sadly, the Bible shows clearly that holiness can be lost. But, because God’s call upon us is enduring, God is faithful and draws us back into acts of re-consecration.

The fact that holiness is not necessarily a permanent state has significant implications. Those of us in the holiness movement believe that the act of consecration can be complete. This means that, in response to God’s grace and call upon us, we can respond wholeheartedly to God. We can give ourselves to God as an offering so thoroughly that we withhold nothing from God. However, we should not misunderstand the nature of this utter consecration. We would miss something of great importance if we were to think of consecration only as a single, once-for-all-times decision. Many have testified to such a decisive act of consecration, but there is more to consecration than a decisive act. Consecration must also characterize our daily existence in Christ. Our consecration must be renewed each day.

Additionally, we should remember that our consecration is the result of God’s preparatory grace. This grace is given to us in the means of grace—preaching, sacraments, searching the Scriptures, plus works of mercy and devotion. All these are means by which God’s grace comes to us and is effective in us. The point is that our consecration does not take place in a spiritual vacuum and without preparation. Behind consecration lies God’s grace and the ministries of the church that help us to live a Christian life. Behind it lie also the daily practices that make up the Christian life. Consecration, then, is another name for our desire to live in the way that agrees with this grace. It is our resolve to cooperate with that grace by engaging in the practices that allow grace to work its effect on us.

So, consecration has two senses. On one hand, it refers to the dramatic, conscious acts of decision in which we dedicate ourselves to God and give ourselves utterly to God. On the other hand, it is a way of describing the life of the Christian as it ought to be lived. Such a life is consecrated because it consists in those practices that are God-pleasing.

Like the call of God, consecration is an essential aspect of holiness for human beings. God’s call is universal, for God calls everyone to enter into a holy relation with the holy God. But consecration is particular: some do not heed the call of God; some do. Some allow themselves to become part of God’s holy priesthood; others resist God. To be holy is to respond faithfully to the call of God by devoting ourselves and the totality of our lives to God.