

THE CHRISTIAN'S RECONSECRATION

by E. K. Alden

Alden's brief work on the spiritual practice of rededication, calling believers to recommit themselves wholeheartedly to God and His service in renewed devotion.

1 Chapters

Table of Contents

1. Alden, E. K. - THE CHRISTIAN'S RECONSECRATION.

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BY REV. E. K. ALDEN.

BOSTON:

NICHOLS AND NOYES.

1866.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1866, by

NICHOLS AND NOYES, In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the District of Massachusetts.

CAMBRIDGE:

STEREOTYPED AND PRINTED BY JOHN WILSON AND SONS.

THE CHRISTIAN'S RECONSECRATION,

UPON the twelfth day of January, 1723, Jonathan Edwards, being then nineteen years of age, wrote the following words: "I have this day solemnly renewed my baptismal covenant and self-dedication, which I renewed when I was received into the communion of the Church. I have been before God; and have given myself, all that I am and have, to God, so that I am not in any respect my own: I can claim no right in myself, no right in this understanding, this will, these affections that are in me; neither have I any right to this body, or any of its members; no right to this tongue, these hands, or feet; no right to these senses, these eyes, these ears, this smell, or taste. I have given myself clear away, and have not retained any thing as my own. I have been to God this morning, and told Him that I gave myself wholly to Him. I have given every power to Him; so that, for the future, I will challenge or claim no right in myself in any respect. I have this morning told Him that I did take Him for my whole portion and felicity, looking on nothing else as any part of my happiness, nor acting as if it were; and His law as the constant rule of my obedience; and would fight with all my might against the world, the flesh, and the devil, to the end of my life. And did believe in Jesus Christ, and receive Him as a Prince and a Saviour; and would adhere to the faith and obedience of the Gospel, how hazardous and difficult soever the profession and practice of it may be. That I did receive the blessed Spirit as my Teacher, Sanctifier, and only Comforter; and cherish all His motions to enlighten, purify, confirm, comfort and assist me. This I have done. And I pray God, for the sake of Christ, to look upon it as a self-dedication; and to receive me now as entirely His own, and deal with me in all respects as such, whether He afflicts me or prospers me, or whatever He pleases to do with me who am His. Now hence-forth I am not to act in any respect as my own. I shall act as my own, if I ever make use of any of my powers to any thing that is not to the glory of God, or do not make the glorifying of Him my whole and entire business; if I murmur in the least at afflictions; if I grieve at the prosperity of others; if I am in any way uncharitable; if I am angry because of injuries; if I revenge my own cause; if I do any thing purely

to please myself, or avoid any thing for the sake of my ease, or omit any thing because it is great self denial; if I trust to myself; if I take any of the praise of any good that I do, or, rather, God does by me; or if I am any way proud. . . Resolved, frequently to renew the dedication of myself to God, which was made at my baptism, and which I solemnly renewed when I was received into the communion of the Church; and which I have solemnly ratified this twelfth day of January, 1723. Resolved, never to act as if I were any way my own, but entirely and altogether God's." Upon -the twenty-fifth of July, 1805, Edward Pay son, being upon that day twenty-two years of age, wrote the following words: " Having resolved this day to dedicate myself to my Creator, in a serious and solemn manner, by a written covenant, I took a review of my past life, and of the numerous mercies by which it has been distinguished. Then, with sincerity as I humbly hope, I took the Lord to be my God, and engaged to love, serve, and obey Him. Relying on the assistance of His Holy Spirit, I engaged to take the Holy Scriptures as the rule of my conduct, the Lord Jesus Christ to be my Saviour, and the Spirit of all grace and consolation as my Guide and Sanctifier. The vows of God are on me." Upon the first of May, 1807, he renewed this dedication of himself to God in a solemn Confession and form of Covenant, closing thus: " As a testimony of my sincere and hearty consent to this covenant, of my hope and desire to see the blessings of it, and as a swift witness against me if I depart from it, I do now, before God and the holy angels, subscribe with my hands unto the Lord. Edward Payson. . . . And may this covenant be ratified in Heaven! And do thou remember, my soul! that the vows of God are upon thee. . . . Having drawn up the above covenant, I spread it before the Lord; and, after confession of sins, -and seeking pardon through the blood of Christ, I did solemnly accept it before Him, as my free act and deed; and embraced Christ in it as the only ground of my hope."

These are illustrations of a Christian's reconsecration, a practical commentary upon the apostolic precepts: "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. . . . Yield yourselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. . . . Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, Which is in you, Which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."

Reconsecration supposes a first consecration. There was a time when, as an anxious sinner oppressed with a sense of guilt and peril, despairing of human help, you beheld the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world; you accepted Him as a personal Redeemer, you recognized His claim to your entire being, and you dedicated yourself to His service. That hallowed hour may be but recent in your experience, or it may be that for many years you have been active in various departments of Christian usefulness; you have enjoyed continuous and comforting evidence that you are a child of God, or, perhaps, your mind has been at times perplexed and darkened; you have maintained a consistent Christian deportment in the eyes of your fellow-men, or, possibly, the fervor of your first love may have declined, and you have been led astray by the corruptions of your own heart, and the temptations of the world. Whatever and wherever you now may be in the Christian pilgrimage, permit me to suggest for your candid consideration the value of a solemn personal act of reconsecration to the Lord Jesus Christ.

I. There are some Christians in whose early experience the idea of consecration is not prominent. They believe in Christ as a Saviour through whom they receive forgiveness of sins and adoption

into the household of God. They know, in some measure, the peace of those who are justified by faith, and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. But they do not, with the same definiteness, apprehend Christ as their Master, to Whom they belong, and in Whose service they dedicate their entire energies to practical personal obedience. This thought does not thoroughly take possession of their souls, and decide the conduct of their lives. They are not conscious of a distinct renunciation of the world, deliberately forsaking all of its attractions, and choosing a life of self-denial, as disciples of Christ. They may live many years, knowing at times genuine Christian emotion and affection; and yet may not thoroughly surrender every thing to the service of Christ, and enter vigorously upon the Christian work. Some are puzzled and perplexed by the call to an entire dedication of thought, purpose, energy, time, property, business, every thing, to Christ, and confess to themselves and to others that they do not understand what it means. They are conscious that it is, in many of its aspects, a new question, and that they have never fully grappled with its requirements. But, as the question begins to present itself in its true significance, and they perceive its fundamental nature, and become aware that it is searching to the innermost motive of their hearts, not unfrequently their whole religious experience is upheaved by it, they take the question up prayerfully and conscientiously in the fear of God; and when, yielding to its claims, they do indeed dedicate their entire being practically and for ever to the service of Christ, the act marks in their history a new and momentous era.

II. There are some who begin the Christian life with a definite act of self-dedication to God, but who fail to retain the idea as an influential power amid the exposures of the world. Of the multitudes awakened to serious thought, who have read "The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul," by Philip Doddridge, not a few, endeavoring in all simplicity to follow his directions, have paused as they concluded the seventeenth chapter, and then and there for themselves have transcribed and signed some form of "self-dedication to the service of God." They have done it with seriousness and prayer, and have never forgotten the impressions of the hour. Probably something of this style of dedication has been known by a considerable number of persons who have been hopefully converted during childhood or early youth. Occasionally, there is one who records that he signs this private covenant of his soul with God with his own blood. The years roll on, and this young, ardent disciple has gone forth to his work in life, determined to be entirely dedicated to the service of Christ, according to the spirit of the covenant into which he has entered with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. But he finds that he has very feebly comprehended what those solemn words included; that it is quite a different matter in youth, in the solitude of private meditation, to transcribe such a covenant, and to sign it upon the knees before God, and in mature years, amid all the exposures of earth's ambition and wealth, to observe that covenant in daily life and conversation. There are some, indeed, who never give over this purpose; who hold themselves steadily to their vows during all their days; and who frequently renew their consecration, with a clearer apprehension of its meaning and with increasing solemnity, to the end of life. But it is a fact to which many will testify in sadness, that the personal dedication which they made to God in the days of their youthful religious fervor, long since lost its practical power in their Christian experience. "The cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things, entering in have choked the word, and it has become unfruitful." The glow of tender personal love to Christ has passed away. They have not cherished the thought of His presence as they have journeyed along their pilgrimage. They have been living, in a great degree, for themselves, consulting their own ease and convenience, turning aside from the path of daily self-denial,

gradually conforming to the world, ceasing the strenuous endeavor to be entirely free from sin and entirely godly in heart and life, until by and by, awakened in the midst of their days to consider where they are in the Christian life, they find themselves absorbed in selfish and worldly plans; and the idea of an entire self-dedication to the service of God, into which they once 'entered with alacrity, is wellnigh appalling to them. They wonder how they ever subscribed to such a covenant, and are almost ready to protest against the act as sacrilege. As they apprehend it now, its significance becomes awful. They begin to reason with themselves, and ask, Does every thing I have belong to God? Am I only a steward using God's property sacredly for His service? Am I living, speaking, transacting business, regulating all my affairs on that principle? If this is the test of Christian discipleship, what is my evidence of piety worth? Some refuse to yield to the searching power of such questions as these, administering to themselves a delusive comfort in the hasty assertion, that entire consecration is an impossibility, and need not be attempted; but others bow down beneath this startling revelation of their own selfishness and pride, submit themselves to the word which pierces even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, cry earnestly to God for mercy, mourn bitterly as they meet the eye of the Saviour they have grieved, and at length know in their own experience the priceless worth of a genuine reconsecration.

III. There are some striving to follow on to know the Lord, who become conscious that their practical ideal of the Christian life is changing, their views are enlarging, they are hungering and thirsting for a type of Christian experience to which they have not yet attained, and which yet seems attainable: they want, as far as it can be known on earth, the full liberty of a child of God; and they find themselves in prayer, meditation, and Christian labor, perpetually impelled toward the endeavor to be consciously and entirely Christ's, " body, soul, and spirit." As one of the helps in this direction, they learn, perhaps after protracted and weary struggles, that there is a wondrous power, while in this attitude of thought, in appropriating the Lord Jesus Christ as an atoning Saviour anew, in recognizing God's right to all we have and are anew, in receiving in a special sense the personal anointing of the Holy Ghost anew, and in accepting the fulness of promises, as they are dawning upon the illumined soul in a richer and more glorious significance, anew. " Resolved," writes Edwards, " to improve every opportunity when I am in my best and happiest frame of mind, to cast and venture my soul on the Lord Jesus Christ; to trust and confide in Him, and consecrate myself wholly to Him." " In order to maintain this habitual delightful sense of God," writes Doddridge, "] would frequently renew my dedication to Him, in that covenant on which all my hopes depend, and my resolutions for universal zealous obedience. I will study redeeming love more, and habitually resign myself and all my concerns to the Divine disposal. ... blessed Spirit! graciously descend on my polluted heart. Strike the flint,

thou almighty arm of the Lord 1 that the waters may flow forth. I come to humble myself before God; I come to renew my resolutions against sin; I come to refer my concerns to Him; I come to seal my engagements to be the Lord's." This is the man who wrote the familiar hymn, whose final stanza begins,

"High Heaven that heard the solemn vow, That vow renewed shall daily hear.' 1 ' 1

Whitefield writes, in the maturity of his life, after long years of fervent laborious service for Christ, "I intend, by God's assistance, now to begin; for as yet, alas! I have done nothing. Oh that

1 may begin in earnest! God quicken my tardy pace, and help me to do much work in little time! "

Occasionally it is an epoch in the Christian life from which some believers date a remarkable change in the joyous consciousness of their souls, when after a painful strife for entire consecration to Christ, at length, with all simplicity of faith, they receive a consecration from Christ: when yielding to what they perceive are His acknowledged claims, they hear Him saying, "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain. ... As My Father hath sent Me, so send I you." Calvin, in his Commentary on the First Epistle of John, exclaims, "I have not sued Thee by my love, Christ! Thou hast loved me of Thy free will. Thou hast shone into my soul, and then every thing that dazzled my eyes by a false splendor immediately disappeared, or at least I take no count of it." Here the Christian's reconsecration and his re-acceptance of the unsearchable riches of Christ sweetly blend together; and what is regarded as that difficult act of self-abdication is found to be a precious act of childlike faith, leading into all the joy and peace of believing. This idea is finely illustrated in the account, given by President Edwards, of the remarkable transports of one whose fresh experience, though she had been a devoted Christian for twenty-seven years, he thus relates; They began near three years ago, in a great increase, in an extraordinary self-dedication and renunciation of the world and resignation of all to God, made in a great view of God's excellency, and high exercise of love to Him, and rest and joy in Him, . . . and began in a yet higher degree, about a year and a half ago, upon another new resignation of all to God, with a yet greater fervency and delight of soul, . . . and began in a much higher degree still, the last winter, upon another resignation and acceptance of God, as the only portion and happiness of the soul, wherein the whole world, with the dearest enjoyments in it, were renounced as dirt and dung; and all that is pleasant and glorious, and all that is terrible in this world, seemed perfectly to vanish into nothing; and nothing to be left but God, in Whom the soul was perfectly swallowed up as in an infinite ocean of blessedness." Is there such a self-dedication of the soul to God as this? Are there such reconsecrations of the already renewed and partially sanctified believer as these, followed by "a constant sweet peace and calm and serenity of soul, without any cloud to interrupt it, ... a wonderful access to God by prayer, as it were seeing Him, and sensibly, immediately conversing with Him; as much, oftentimes, as if Christ were here upon earth, ... all sorrow and sighing fled away, except grief for past sins and for remaining corruption, and that Christ is loved no more, and that God is no more honored in the world, and a compassionate grief toward fellow-creatures, a daily sensible doing and suffering every thing for God, . . . doing all as the service of love, and so doing it with a continual, uninterrupted cheerfulness, peace and joy? ' Well may we exclaim, with the narrator of this experience, " If such things are enthusiasm and the fruits of a distempered brain, let my brain be evermore possessed of that happy distemper! If this be distraction, I pray God that the world of mankind may be all seized with this benign, meek, beneficent, beatifical, glorious distraction! '

It does not become one Christian believer to mark out the precise method in which another shall for himself perform this solemn act of personal reconsecration to God. The method will differ according to the constitutional temperament and external circumstances of each individual, and will also be modified by peculiarities of past religious experience. Let each one select his own method. It may be by means of some written form of covenant signed and sealed as in the Divine presence; it may be by making an inventory of all one has and is, and specifically dedicating property, business, time, reading, recreation,* family, person, body, and mind to God; it may be in the forgetting of what is behind, and a new and full acceptance of Christ as all in all; it may be in

connection with agonizing supplication; it may be in simple, quiet trust: but in some form let it be a transaction between each individual and God, the genuine outpouring of the soul with the sincerity of one meeting his Lord face to face, and henceforth knowing Him in the fellowship of a loved and loving child.

Come then, longing disciple! not merely to make a consecration, but also to receive a consecration. Your Lord and Master is setting you apart anew for His own work, and will bestow upon you of His own fullness. For it is the blessedness of yielding up all to God, that henceforth you receive all from God; and, if you are His, He also is yours. Not, then, with timid and

* " Let me consecrate my sleep and all my recreations to God, and seek them for his sake." Doddridge.

hesitating steps, but with joyous thanksgivings, amazed at our own sinful distrust, hastening to fall down penitently and confess our sin, hastening to receive the Divine benediction waiting to be bestowed upon us, let us now approach the altar of our God, blessing Him that it is our privilege, with a clearer apprehension of the significance of the act, to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service.

Almighty God! Whose I am by creation, preservation, and redemption, I do now bow before Thee, a sinner utterly unworthy, renouncing self, appropriating anew to my own soul the blood of the atonement; accepting anew the Lord Jesus Christ as the way, the truth, and the life; acknowledging Thee, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as my gracious, ever-present God. I do now surrender every member of my body and every faculty of my mind to Thee, to be used by Thee as 'Thou shalt please. I give to Thee, without reservation, my time, my business, my earthly possessions, receiving all that Thou shalt bestow as a sacred trust to be employed in Thy service. To the extension of Thy kingdom in the world, to the salvation of my fellow-men, to the glory of Christ, my Saviour, I devote, with thankfulness of heart, all I have and am. I accept Thy blessing, Thy guidance, Thy constant presence, Holy Comforter, to be with me and in me evermore to the end. And as I now feel Thy hand, Divine Redeemer, laid upon my head re-dedicating me to Thy service, accept the dedication. "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." "THY VOWS ARE UPON ME, GOD I "

COVENANT.

[The following form of covenant has been prepared, by Rev. Dr. KIRK, on the basis of one which was written by President EDWARDS. It is inserted here for those who may desire to use such a form.]

IN the name of my God and Saviour, "Who promises me strength for all my work, I hereby enter into this covenant.

Acknowledging my unworthiness and His infinite goodness; deeply lamenting my present unhappy distance from Him; fervently imploring the forgiveness of all my sins, and entreating for Christ's sake to be called a child of God, I hereby renounce the world as my portion; all the pleasures, honors, and profits of sin; and take the Lord to be my portion and my Saviour.

I engage to make it my supreme design, to exalt God above all creatures in my own view, and in the view of all men.

I will endeavor evermore to stand upon the foundation God has laid in Zion, the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the ground of my peaceful relations with God.

I engage, in all my conversation and intercourse with others, to deal honestly, justly, and uprightly; never overreaching or defrauding in any matter, nor wilfully injuring them in their interest.

I engage to give no just cause of offence to any; either by negligently withholding from him his dues, or by speaking evil of him, or needlessly mentioning his faults, or by allowing a spirit of ill-will or any unkind feeling, or by maintaining a party spirit.

I engage to obey the Lord's command, "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way: first be reconciled to thy brother; and then come, and offer thy gift."

I engage to avoid all those pastimes, which, upon sober and prayerful consideration, seem to me inconsistent with a devout religious spirit and close walking with God.

I engage to promote, in myself and others, all generous, pure, heavenly dispositions; to walk in my house in the fear of the Lord.

I engage to put away, as far as is in my power, within me and around me, every thing that hinders my own growth in holiness and the conversion of others to God.

Cheerfully and gratefully I lay myself, and all I am and own, at the feet of Him who redeemed me with His precious blood, engaging to follow Him, and bearing the cross He places upon me.

By this covenant I will frequently examine myself, and review my life; occasionally renewing it with prayer and fasting.

To God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, the God of grace and salvation, I hereby devote myself for time and eternity. Amen.

Addresses to Church Members

Are in preparation, as follows. viz.:

1. The Duty of a more Strict Observance of the Sabbath, by Rev. Dr. BLAGDEN.
2. The Power and Office of the Holy Spirit, by Kev. Dr. ADAMS.
3. The Power of Prayer, by Rev. Dr. KIRK.
4. The Christian's Reconsecration, by Rev. Mr. ALDEN.
5. The Worldliness of Nominal Christians, by Rev. Dr. TV EBB.
6. The Spread of the Gospel in the City among the Poor and those who habitually neglect the Services of the Sabbath, by Rev. Dr. DEXTER.
7. The Christian's Duty to work for the Saving of Souls, by Rev. Mr. BINGHAM.

8. Revivals of Religion, by Rev. Mr. TODD.

9. The Duty of Daily Secret Prayer and Daily Study of the Bible, by Rev. Mr. MANNING.

10. The Duty of Christians to unite with some Church, and the Duty of Church Members to unite with the Church where they stately worship, by Rev. Mr. FAY.

11. The 'Divine Sovereignty in its Relation to Human Salvation, by Rev. Mi 1 . BAKER.

In accordance with the recommendation of the Council, the Addresses named above will be printed without delay, for the purpose suggested. The first of the series, by Rev. Mr. ALDEN, will be issued in a few days.

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