

Conscript Christians

by Daniel Steele

The sermon emphasizes the transformative power of love in Christian service, contrasting it with the fear-driven compliance of conscript Christians.

Scripture: Galatians 3:24

Topics: "Spiritual Freedom", "Christian Service"

Description

Daniel Steele preaches about the transformation from serving God out of fear to serving Him out of love, using the analogy of conscripted soldiers versus volunteers in a nation's army. He emphasizes the importance of moving from a legalistic and servile mindset to one of joyful and free service to Christ, where love becomes the driving force behind our actions. Steele highlights the need for believers to transition from being under the law to being led by love for Jesus, experiencing the fullness of the Spirit and the fruit it produces in their lives.

Transcript

In a recent struggle for a nation's life, when the volunteering spirit flagged, a conscription law was enacted. This law was designed to reinforce the weak patriotism of multitudes who shrank from the hardships and hazards of the camp. The drafted soldiers did good service to their country, and their graves are honored as highly as the graves where sleep the volunteers. But there was a great difference in the character of the service. The one was spontaneous, free, and joyous, while the other was constrained, reluctant, and servile. The one felt no hardships, because love knows no burdens in the service of its object; the other, urged on by the fear of the law, felt that the knapsack on his shoulders weighed a ton.

The conscript is tormented with the temptation to play the poltroon in battle, and to desert his country's service. Every day in the camp he counts as a day subtracted from the happiness of life.

The volunteer rushes into the battle with patriotic songs, and is brought back on a stretcher mortally wounded; and when he turns his glassy eye, for the last time, towards the regimental flag, he thanks God for a country worth bleeding and dying for. Let us suppose that the conscript, noting this contrast with shame, prays to God for better feelings towards his country, and that there suddenly falls upon him a baptism of patriotism. His country now stands forth before his eyes "the chiefest among ten thousand, and the one altogether lovely." (S. of Sol. 5:10.) His country's flag is no longer the symbol of a hateful despotism which has ruthlessly despoiled him of his liberty, but the emblem of the sweetest freedom. The temptation to desert never comes to him now. If the term for which he was drafted should end today, he

would find a recruiting officer in an hour and enlist for the whole war, bounty or no bounty. So passionately does he love his native land that he covets the privilege of fighting till the last enemy lays down his arms, and the flag shall float over every acre of the redeemed Republic. What is this change which has taken place in this soldier? Love, instead of fear, has taken up its abode behind his will as the motive of his actions. Love is the magical transformer.

Perfect love casts out all fear. -- 1 John 4:18.

The reader may easily conjecture the application of this illustration.

There are in all churches multitudes of Christians arrested and pressed into the service of Christ by the constraining fear of the law. Though the goodness of God is certainly designed to lead men to repentance, it so manifestly fails that all successful preachers must follow the example of their Master, and proclaim the terrors of the law, and point to the drawn sword of justice flashing in the skies and ready to fall upon the heads of the impenitent. We do not deny that a kind of feeble, invertebrate, or backboneless spiritual life may exist where only the goodness of God is preached; but for the production of a strong, victorious, spiritual life, the law must be our schoolmaster to lead us to Christ. (Gal. 3:24.) In Greece and Rome a slave was detailed, in aristocratic families, to be the paidagogos) or child-leader, whose duty it was to grasp with his rough hand the hand of the boy, and lead his unwilling feet to the schoolroom. St. Paul asserts that this is the office of the law, to be the child-leader to bring us to Christ the great Teacher.

This beautiful imagery illustrates the point where the impelling power of fear is changed to love as the motive of Christian service. When the law relaxes its grasp we become dead to the law as a motor, and love to Jesus, the Lawgiver, takes its place. Now, the difficulty with many believers is that they do not get out of the hand of the child-leader and enter the school of Christ. They seem to remain in the vestibule. In plain terms, there is somewhat of legality and servility in their service. They are in the condition of John Wesley during the first eleven years of his ministry; they are servants of God accepted and safe, but have not yet received the spirit of adoption by which they are assured of their sonship to God and joint heirship with Christ. Hence, there is no sunshine in their souls, no joyfulness in their service. They serve as under a taskmaster. They deny themselves as the law of discipleship requires but they secretly wish this hard requirement was abolished. They bear the cross much as one Simon, who bore the cross of the fainting Christ along the via dolorosa, the way of grief, from Pilate's hall to the hill of Calvary. They sing --

"Look, how we grovel here below,

Fond of these earthly toys;

Our souls how heavily they go

To reach eternal joys."

Some of our hymnologists have made the song still worse by altering the last couplet thus --

"Our souls can neither fly nor go

To reach eternal joys."

A very discouraging condition, indeed, for souls called to scale the mount of God, to be destitute of both wings and feet, when the promise is, that "they that wait upon the Lord shall mount up with wings as

eagles, and run and not be weary." -- Isa. 40:31.

The remedy is near at hand and attainable by all. It is the fullness of the Spirit coming into the soul through simple trust in Jesus Christ, who has promised to send the Comforter into the heart of every one who unswervingly trusts his word. That this is a conscious and permanent blessing, we infer from the promise that he shall abide forever, and from the assurance given to the disciples that they shall know him "for he shall be in you." John 14:17. It is the office of this divine Comforter to shed abroad the love of God in the heart. He will also bring to maturity the fruit of the Spirit -- love, joy, peace, etc. This is the grand cure of the ailments of the church, that army of the Lord, of which, at the present time, the majority belong to the invalid corps, and are serving their great Captain, not in the field, but in the hospital.

The only effectual impetus which shall set in motion a stationary church fast fettered by worldliness, indifference, and unbelief, is a pentecostal outpouring. The only way that this is to be obtained on a scale which shall be felt all through the world, is for each church, or group of churches, to gather in one place with one accord, and persist in prayer and faith, till the mighty effusion is poured down from the opened windows of heaven.

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