

The True Source of All ministry... Union With Christ

by T. Austin-Sparks

The true source of all ministry is union with Christ, and this union is characterized by death to self, obedience, and a spiritual ear that hears and follows the Lord's voice.

Scripture: Leviticus 8:22-24, Ecclesiastes 9:10, Matthew 16:22, John 17:19, Romans 12:1-2

Topics: "Consecration", "Union with Christ"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of union with Christ in ministry, illustrating the dual aspects of consecration through the shedding and sprinkling of blood as seen in Leviticus 8. He explains that true consecration involves surrendering our ears, hands, and feet to God's will, ensuring that our lives are governed solely by His voice and interests. The sermon draws parallels between the consecration of Aaron and the High Priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17, highlighting the necessity of being dead to self and alive to God. Sparks encourages believers to seek God's direction in their lives, emphasizing that true success is found in obedience to His call, regardless of worldly expectations. Ultimately, he calls for a renewed commitment to living as a living sacrifice, wholly dedicated to God's purposes.

Transcript

Reading: Leviticus 8:22-24; Romans 12:1-2; John 17:19.

Referring to this passage in chapter 8 of the book of Leviticus, it is important to note what happened at that particular point in the consecration of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood. The ram of consecration was brought; Aaron and his sons laid their hands upon it; and then it was slain, its blood was shed. That blood was then taken and put upon them at different points of their beings.

There we have two sides of consecration. The shedding of the blood is the death side, and the sprinkling of the blood is the life side. The blood poured out is the life poured out, delivered up, let go or taken away. Sprinkling is the making active and energetic of the ministry in a living power. When you recognize that, you understand what consecration is, and also the meaning of the laying on of hands, the act of identification with a life poured out, a life yielded up, a life let go, a life taken away unto death. In the act of sprinkling a new position is represented, implying that now there is no longer anything of the self life, but all is livingly of God, active by God, and unto God alone. That is consecration.

Chapter 17 of the Gospel by John is known to us familiarly as the High-Priestly prayer of the Lord Jesus. He is there, in effect advancing to the altar in an act of consecration of Himself, in the behalf of His sons, whom He is seeking to bring to glory, that they may behold His Glory, and that the glory which He had might be theirs. Here is undoubtedly that which is represented by Aaron and his sons. The High Priest is consecrating Himself, as He says, that they also may be consecrated. The rest of the prayer is a wonderful exposition of the inner meaning of this part of Leviticus 8. In the little while at our disposal we shall seek to understand it more clearly.

The whole man has come into the realm of consecration on both its sides; the death side, and the life side; the life poured out, and the life taken again; the life let go, and the life resumed, but on another basis; the whole man is involved, as represented by his ear, his hand, his foot. That has a simple and direct message to our hearts.

The Government of the Ear

We begin with the ear: "...upon the tip of Aaron's right ear." That means that the Lord is to have supreme control of the ear, that we must come on to the ground where the ear is dead to every other controlling voice, every other governing suggestion, and is alive unto God, and unto God alone. It is quite clear that, in some way, the governing faculty of every life is the ear; not necessarily the outward organ, but that by which we listen to suggestions, that, as we say, to which we "give ear." The suggestions may arise from our own temperament and make-up; the constraining things in our life may be our natural inclination; the pull and the draw of our constitution; deep-seated ambitions, inclinations, interests, which are not cultivated nor acquired, but which are simply in us because we are made that way. To listen to these is to have our lives governed by our own interests. Or it may be other things, such as the suggestions, the desires, the ambitions of others for us; the call of the world; the call of human affections; consideration for the likes of others. Oh, how many things may come to us like the activity of a voice, to which, if we listen, we shall become slaves and servants, and the ear, and the life with it, become so governed.

This illustrative truth in Leviticus 8 says, definitely and emphatically, to you and to me, that that shedding, that slaying, was the slaying of our ear and our hearing in respect of all such voices, and that sprinkling meant that we now have a ear only for the Lord, and He is to have the controlling voice in our life. The right ear, as the right hand, is the place of honour and power so far as the hearing and the speaking are concerned. Then you and I, if we say that we are consecrated men and women, mean that we have brought the death of Christ to bear upon all the government and domination of voices which arise from any quarter save from the Lord Himself. We are not to consult the voice of our own interests, our own ambitions, our own inclinations, or the voice of anyone else's desires for us. We must have an ear only for the Lord. That is consecration.

It is a solemn and direct word for everyone, and perhaps especially for the younger men and women, whose lives are more open now to be governed by other considerations, because life lies before them. It may happily be that the sense of responsibility about life is uppermost; the feeling is that it might be disastrous to make a mistake, and along with it there is a strong ambition to succeed and not to have a wasted life. Herein is your law for life, and although the course of things may be strange, and the Lord's ways oftentimes perplexing, and you may be called upon in a very deep way to give ear to the exhortation addressed to us in the book of Proverbs, "trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding," nevertheless, in the outworking, you will find that God's success has been achieved, and, after all, what matters more than that, or as much as that? The course may be very different from what you

expected, or thought, or judged would be the reasonable way for your life, but that does not matter so long as God has been successful in your life, so long as your life has been a success from God's standpoint. This is the secret, an ear alive only unto Him, and dead to everything that comes from any quarter other than the Lord Himself.

Chapter 17 of John's Gospel is an exposition of that. "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." If we were of the world, we should take the judgments of the world for our lives; what the world would suggest to be the course of greatest success, prosperity, advantage. The spirit of the world does sometimes get into our own hearts, and suggests to us that it would be fatal for us to take this course or that to give heed to that voice is to become conformed to this age. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service": and from the outset the point of supreme government is the ear. The ear must be put under the blood, to be God's vehicle of government. It means that we must have a spiritual ear. As children of God we have, by reason of our new birth, a spiritual faculty of hearing, and we must take heed to develop it as the Lord would have us do.

It means that the ear must be a listening ear. Many people hear, and yet do not hear; they have ears and they hear, but yet they hear not, because they do not listen. The Lord says many things to us, and we do not hear what He is saying, although we know He is saying something. There must be a quiet place for the Lord in our lives. The enemy will fill our lives with the voices of other claims, and duties, and pressures, to make it impossible for us to have the harvest of the quiet ear for the Lord. That ear must be an ear that is growing in capacity. The child has an ear, and it hears, but it does not always understand what it hears. A babe hears sounds, and you notice the signs of the babe having heard a sound, but that babe does not understand the sound that it hears. As it grows, it begins to know the meaning of those sounds. In the same way there must be a spiritual ear, a consecrated ear, marked by the same features of growth and progress. Then, further, this ear must be an obedient ear, so that hearing we obey. Thus God governs the life from the outset.

The Work of Our Hands

Then we come to the thumb: "...and upon the thumb of his right hand..." The order is quite right, the ear first and the hand next. The Lord must have the place of honour and strength in the activities of our life, in the work of our life. Now this all sounds very elementary, but we must listen for the Lord's voice in it. The point is that in whatever we are doing, or about to do, in all our service, there must be death to self; no self-serving, no world-serving, no serving for our own gratification, pleasure, advantage, honour, glory, position, exaltation, reputation. In the death of our Offering we died to all that, and now our hand, in whatever it does - and it may have to work in this world's business, to do a multitude of uninteresting things of a very ordinary character - whatever activity of life it has to engage in, on the one side, our hand is to be dead to self, and, on the other side, to work with the Lord's interests in view, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do; do it with thy might..." (Ecclesiastes 9:10). You will remember how much the Apostle warned about service being done to men, as by men pleasers, and not as unto the Lord. He was speaking largely to the slave of those days. When the slave system obtained - and the slaves had to do many, many things that must have gone much against the grain - he said to them: Fulfill your service, not as unto those men who are your masters, but as unto the Lord. We must question ourselves as to why we are in any given place, or what it is that moves us to desire any particular place or work. What is the governing motive of our ambition for service? Before God we must be able to say that any personal or worldly consideration is dead, and that our service now is not only not a reluctant, nor resigned giving of ourselves to what we

have to do, but a ready applying of ourselves to even difficult, hard, unpleasant and uninteresting things for the Lord's pleasure.

Do write this word in your heart, that the Lord will not, indeed cannot, exalt you and give you something else, something more fruitful, more profitable, more glorious for Himself, until in that least, that mean, that despised, that irksome, maybe even revolting place and work, you have rendered your service utterly as unto Him, even if it has meant a continual self-crucifixion. That is the way of promotion. This is the way in which we come into a position where the Lord gets more out of our lives than we imagine He is getting. There is a priestly ministry in doing that difficult and unpleasant thing as unto the Lord, but we do not see that we are priests at the time. The idea of being girded with a linen ephod, at the time when you are scrubbing floors and washing dishes, and other like things, is altogether remote from your imagination. Yet there is a testimony being borne which is effective, of which, maybe, you have no consciousness. It may come to light one day. Someone may say: I proved that Jesus Christ is a reality, simply by seeing the way in which you did what I know you naturally hated doing; it was wholly distasteful to you, you had no heart for it, but you did it in such a way that it convinced me that Christ is a living reality. That is no imagination and sentiment, it is true to life. The Lord has His eye upon us.

The Directed Walk

Next we consider the toe, "...and upon the great toe of his right foot." That means that the Lord is to have the direction of our lives, that all our outgoings and our stayings are to be controlled alone by the Lord's interests. We are not always being bidden to go. Sometimes the going is a relief, it is staying which is so difficult. We are so eager to go, and yet often the Lord has a difficulty to get us to go in His way. However the case may be, it is a simple point, it is a direct word. Our going has been rendered dead to all but the Lord, and our staying also. Our life has been poured out, has been let go, has been taken away, that is, the life which is for ourselves, of ourselves. Life has been taken up on another level.

The Supreme Example

Apply that to the great High Priest. Had He ever an ear for Himself or for the world? Had He not an ear for the Father alone? Trace His life through again. Satan came to Him in the wilderness, and began to speak. We do not know how this took place. We know that the Lord must have spoken of the matter secretly and confidentially to some, for no one had been with Him, He had been alone. We do not know whether Satan appeared in physical form, and spoke with an audible voice, but the probability is that it was not so, and that he wrought rather by inward suggestion, the strong bearing down upon the Lord Jesus of certain other considerations, every one of which was in His Own interest. There is no doubt whatever that Satan spoke to Him in some way, and He heard what Satan said, but His ear was crucified, and the power of that voice was paralyzed by His consecration to the Father. In effect He triumphed on this ground: I have no ear for you, My ear is for the Father alone!

Satan came in other forms, not always openly, but under cover. Thus a beloved disciple would sometimes serve him for a tool: "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall never be unto thee" (Matt. 16:22). The Lord turned and said, "Get thee behind me, Satan"; He recognized that as the voice of self-consideration, self-preservation; He was dead to that; this way of the Cross was the Father's way for Him; He had an ear for Him only. And so it was, all the way through.

Was it true of His service? Did He for a moment seek His Own ends by His works, His Own glory by what He did? No! Even in tiredness and weariness and exhaustion, if there were interests of the Father to be

served, He was alive to those interests, never consulting His Own glory, or His Own feelings; and I have no doubt that His feelings were sometimes those of acute suffering. We read of Him as "being wearied." We know what that is, and how in weariness we would not only sit on the well, but remain sitting on the well, even though some demand were being made upon us. If we are the Lord's, we must be governed by the Lord's interests, and brush aside all the rising suggestions of looking after ourselves. So it was with Him in all His goings. He submitted His going or His staying to the Father. His brethren would argue that He should go up to the feast, but He does not yield to their persuasions and arguments. His one criterion is, what does the Father say about this? His mother entreats Him at the marriage in Cana, and says they have no wine. His unlooked reply is, "What have I to do with thee?" In other words, what does the Father say about this? So His whole life was, on the one hand, dead to self, to the world, and, on the other hand, alive only to God. And what a fruitful life, what a God-satisfying life!

There is a oneness with Christ in consecration. "For their sakes I consecrate myself, that they themselves also may be consecrated in truth." "I beseech you therefore... present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship..." That is our priesthood.

Will you listen to that word? Will you take that word to the Lord in prayer? Will you get down before Him with it? Perhaps it is a word to bring about an end to a struggle, a fight, a conflict; an end to restlessness, chafing, a lack of peace, lack of joy. You may have been fretted, you may have been thinking of your life as being wasted, and you are all in a ferment. Are you reaching out for something? Are you being governed by your own conception of things, by what other people think of you, by what the world would do, or what others would do, if they were in your place? These are not the voices for you to heed. What does the Lord say? Wait upon that; rest in that. You may not understand, but be sure a life on this basis is going to be God's success. Do you want God's success? God may do something through you for which you are temperamentally, constitutionally, altogether unfit, and for your part you have thought that, because you are made in a certain way, that must govern your direction in life. Not at all! Come, then, let us get down before Him on this matter, to deal with consecration, if needs be, all anew.

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