

A Majestic Consecration

1 Peter 2:9, Exodus 30:22-30, Isaiah 52:8-11, 1 Peter 1:13-16

Slide 1

The religious system of the Old Testament was a formal, ritualistic religion.

When most people hear a statement like that, minds immediately form negative, disparaging thoughts about religious formality and ritual but that would be an unfair observation. Why?

First, the formality and ritual of Old Testament religion didn't automatically exclude a sense of a profound, powerful and often deeply personal spiritual relationship with God.

The Old Testament itself bears witness to this in the Psalms and the Prophets.

Second, the formality and ritual of Old Testament religion provided a structure that served to teach the Israelites important lessons about the nature of God and His work in the world.

Once a year the sacrificial liturgy took the High Priest behind the veil to sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice on that mysterious piece of furniture called the Ark of the Covenant.

The central spot on top of the Ark, between the gold figures of the cherubim, was called the "mercy seat" which taught the Israelites that God was ultimately a merciful God.

Then, the strict, systematic process of sacrifice and cleansing that the priests had to follow in their approach to the presence of God taught the Israelites that God was first and foremost holy.

This taught the people that holiness in worship and life mattered very much to God.

That both existed together in the same ritual taught the Israelites that mercy and holiness were not contradictory impulses.

They learned that mercy and holiness were both reflective of the nature and character of God. They learned that being merciful didn't preclude the love of holiness.

There's a particular aspect of Old Testament religion that I've always found very interesting. All the physical elements used in the rituals were made of earthly materials.

The tabernacle furniture was made from wood, bronze, and gold. Sacrificial utensils were bronze. Incense was crafted from herbs and resins.

The Tabernacle itself was constructed of hides and cloth, and the Temple that came later was built of stone and wood.

Sacrifices were animals, a cup of wine poured out, or even a handful of flour. The priests cleansed themselves with water. The priests' garments were linen and the priests themselves were just men.

Nothing used in the rituals was alien, strange, or foreign to the Israelites. Nothing used had fallen from the sky, nothing was gifted from the heavenly realm. All of it was earthly, and much of it quite ordinary.

Yet in Old Testament worship, these earthly, ordinary elements somehow gained an extraordinary significance. Through their use, sins were remitted. Through their use, the will of God was revealed.

Through their use, fire would fall from heaven. Through their use, victory was achieved.

Through their use, the most holy and omnipotent God made His presence known in the Sanctuary and showed that He dwelled among His people.

So, what was it that granted ordinary wood and metal, hides and linen, herbs and resins, and even men such extraordinary significance?

What made such earthly materials sufficient for divine service? What ennobled such base things and made them instruments of ministry? It was consecration.

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You know, most of the time churchy people use a particular vocabulary. A vocabulary we've learned and adopted through our years of being part of the church world.

We use it without necessarily thinking about what the words mean and we often use it without regard for those who don't know that vocabulary.

That's why in this series I've tried to be careful to help you understand terms like "salvation" and "commitment."

It's important that believers really understand what these things mean, and it's important that those who aren't familiar with our religious vocabulary are able to follow what's being said.

It's also important that I take a few moments to be sure that all of us understand what "consecration" means.

We can't really appreciate the significance of the idea without a basic knowledge of the word itself. While the idea of consecration is profound, the meaning of the word itself is simple.

"Consecration" is simply the process by which an object, a place, or a person, is set apart for sacred use.

In ancient times, this most always involved some sort of ritual through which people publicly recognized that a once ordinary object, a once ordinary place, or a once ordinary person, was no longer ordinary, but separated for sacred use.

What had been consecrated was holy. All ancient cultures understood this concept. Even pagans understood "consecration" this way; ordinary things, ordinary places, and ordinary people set aside for sacred use.

Once that consecration had been made, no longer could that ordinary thing be used in an ordinary way; it was sacred use; it was holy.

For the Israelites, this process of consecration generally involved the object or person being anointed with a rare and costly oil blended specifically for this purpose and this purpose alone.

All objects used in Tabernacle worship had to be anointed with this oil, and once they were, they could not be used for anything else except worship.

But it's important to understand that the oil itself contained no magical properties. The ritual of anointing didn't change the basic nature of the thing anointed.

An anointed bronze shovel was still a bronze shovel. An anointed silver bowl was still a silver bowl. Anointed bread was still bread. An anointed man was still a human being.

What changed was awareness. This is a truth you need to grasp. What had been ordinary just moments before was now set aside only for sacred use, and everyone was aware of that consecration.

They were aware that “*these are sacred things, this is a sacred place, or this is a sacred person.*”

The great power of consecration was in the mind and heart. This is the great truth of consecration; its power lies in an altered awareness.

Another great truth of consecration is about purpose and use. There is purpose to consecration that involves how the thing consecrated was to be used.

In the tradition of ancient Israel, consecrated things were never merely decorative; they were always consecrated for a particular function, a particular use.

So, consecrated bread was to be eaten by the priests. Consecrated trumpets were to be played in worship. Consecrated lamps burned to give light.

Consecration wasn’t for nothing. Consecration wasn’t to set a thing on a shelf and admire it.

A person, place, or thing that was consecrated was set apart for sacred service. This is the great truth of consecration; that consecration is about purpose and use.

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You must understand that consecration isn’t an idea that’s relevant only to Old Testament worship; the New Testament makes clear that the Church is a consecrated people.

We're a people that are set aside for sacred use and that's what Peter is driving at in his first letter. In fact, Peter presents both truths of consecration, the truth of awareness and the truth of purpose.

1 Peter 1:13, *"Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming."*

That's about awareness; it's about us being aware that we're consecrated.

1 Peter 1:15, *"But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do."*

That's about purpose; it's about us doing the work of the consecrated. In fact, our text for this series teaches us that we are a consecrated people.

In 1 Peter 2:9 we're told that we *"are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession."* That's about us being aware that we're consecrated.

And Peter continues: *"that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."* That's about us doing the work of the consecrated.

Even Paul teaches us that we are a consecrated people in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, *"Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies."*

He tell us that not only are we to be aware that we're consecrated; we are to be doing the work of consecrated people.

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Consecration" is not just being set aside for sacred use, the power of consecration is in our altered awareness. It's practical. It's about purpose and use.

As Peter and Paul have shown us, consecration isn't restricted to the Old Testament world. We, the Church, with the name of Christ upon us and the Spirit of Christ within us, are a consecrated people.

So, how does that work? Well, it starts with the way we think and flows into the way we live. Consecrated people think differently and live differently. They think about sin differently. Consecrated people shun sin.

Now, that doesn't mean that the consecrated shun sinners. How can you do Christ's work in the world if you shun people? You can't. I mean that consecrated people shun the works of sin in their own lives.

To the consecrated, sin is shunned, not because it'll take them to hell but because sin is corrupting; it brings impurity; it twists and distorts and it defiles consecration.

The consecrated shun sin because they know that God, in His great grace, has set them aside for sacred use. They know that when sin has its way, it'll destroy that sacred use.

So, the consecrated strive to not only avoid the practice of sin in life, but they also seek to avoid the very appearance of evil. They want to live in a way that reveals the holy nature of the One Who has called them.

The consecrated ask themselves different questions than others do. They don't just ask themselves, "*Is this sin?*" Instead they ask themselves, "*Will this allow the nature of God to be revealed through my life?*"

The consecrated think about salvation differently. For them, salvation isn't about not going to hell. For the consecrated, salvation is about being delivered from darkness to live in the light.

For them, salvation is about living in the Kingdom of God. For them, salvation is about doing the work of the Kingdom in the world.

The consecrated think differently about their education, their jobs, and their careers.

For the consecrated, it's no longer just about how all of this will advance their goals, fulfill their dreams, or prosper their lives; it's about doing God's work.

They ask themselves, *“Will this education, this job, or this career help fulfill the plan and purpose of God? Is all this in alignment with the values of the Kingdom of God? Will all this help me engage in the sacred work of the Kingdom that God has set me aside to do?”*

Then, having determined the answers, they carefully choose their path in life. For the consecrated, there is no aspect of life that is not influenced by the awareness that God has set them apart.

There's no aspect of life that's outside the practical expression of that consecration. Everything from activities to relationships is considered in light of their consecration.

Why? Because God has set them aside for sacred use.

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Conclusion

Therefore, *“What is the state of your consecration?”* Do you live with the awareness of the One who has set you apart for sacred use?

Do you make your choices in life to reflect your sacred purpose? Or have you been living as if your life was your own, to do with as you choose, as you see fit?

One of the wonderful things about this New Covenant era, this era of grace, is that if we know that we've not been living the life we've been called to, we can reconsecrate ourselves.

Today we can rededicate ourselves to God's sacred use, to God's plan and purpose. Today, we have that opportunity.