

"It Is Well With My Soul"

Consecration

How to Achieve a Committed Life

For me, be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live:
If Jordan above me shall roll;
No pang shall be mine, for in death as in life,
Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul.

"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain"

(Philippians 1:21)

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Monday:

- (1) Read "Day 1: No Pang Shall Be Mine"
- (2) Answer Questions for "Day 1"
- (3) Memorize Phil. 1:21
- (4) Memorize Stanza of "It Is Well With My Soul."

Tuesday:

- (1) Read "Day 2: Gaining a Perspective on Life and Death"
- (2) Answer Questions for "Day 2"
- (3) Memorize Phil. 1:21
- (4) Memorize Stanza of "It Is Well With My Soul."

Wednesday:

- (1) Read "Day 3: Generating a Value for Life and Death"
- (2) Answer Questions for "Day 3"
- (3) Memorize Phil. 1:21
- (4) Memorize Stanza of "It Is Well With My Soul."

Thursday:

- (1) Read "Day 4: Governing a Life in Prospect of Death"
- (2) Answer Questions for "Day 4"
- (3) Memorize Phil. 1:21
- (4) Memorize Stanza of "It Is Well With My Soul."

Friday:

- (1) Read "Day 5: Governing a Death in Prospect of Life"
- (2) Answer Questions for "Day 5"
- (3) Memorize Phil. 1:21
- (4) Memorize Stanza of "It Is Well With My Soul."

Saturday:

- (1) Read "Supplement: J. C. Ryle on Consecration"
 - (2) Answer Questions for "Bonus: Supplement"
 - (3) Memorize Phil. 1:21
 - (4) Memorize Stanza of "It Is Well With My Soul."
 - (5) Write a Testimony: Choose one of the truths learned from the lesson and explain how you personally experienced that truth in your life during the week.
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1. Day 1: No Pang Shall Be Mine

- (1) What does the term "consecrate" mean?
- (2) How does the principle of resignation produce the power of sanctification?
- (3) How is the hymn writer comforted in prospect of death?

2. Day 2: Gaining a Perspective on Life and Death

- (1) Why should Philippians 1:21 not be undervalued due to its length?
- (2) Describe the way you feel about the certainty of the life you live and the death you will experience.
- (3) Why is it important to discover the meaning of life?

3. Day 3: Generating a Value for Life and Death

- (1) What do births and deaths enable us to do?
- (2) Name six implications pronounced in Paul's testimony that help estimate the value of life?
- (3) Who is Oskar Schindler and what can you learn from his story?

4. Day 4: Governing a Life in Prospect of Death

- (1) What role does government have in your life?
- (2) Describe the kind of government sinners establish for themselves and explain why it is bad.
- (3) What exactly do the words "to me to live is Christ" mean?

5. Day 5: Governing a Death in Prospect of Life

- (1) How does the link between life and death help us govern our lives and deaths?
- (2) How does Christ help us face the four daunting features of death confidently?
- (3) What is the legacy of a Christian?

6. Bonus: Supplement

- (1) According to the first paragraph, how is a person able to live a holy life?
 - (2) According to the second paragraph, how is a person able to grow in a holy life?
 - (3) According to the last three paragraphs, how is a person able to strengthen a holy life?
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The Scripture Frame

Philippians 1:21

(These notes are to be used in conjunction with the daily studies)

The Condition of Existence: Living - an entrance and environment (on the earth)

For to me to live

The Substance of Existence: Christ is the Fulness of Life on Earth
is Christ,

The Condition of Existence: Dying - an entrance and environment (in heaven)

and to die

The Substance of Existence: Christ is the Fulness of Life in Heaven
is gain.

Day 1: No Pang Shall Be Mine

*For me, be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live:
If Jordan above me shall roll;
No pang shall be mine, for in death as in life,
Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul.*

Introduction: The term consecrate is a late 14th Century word taken from the Latin "consecratus". The prefix "con" means "together" and the word "secratus" means "to make holy" which is the derivative of the term "sacred". The resulting idea is that of someone bringing together and setting aside individual parts for a special purpose. The fourth stanza of "It Is Well With My Soul" expresses this great truth. The hymn writer has gathered together every detail of his life and dedicated all to Christ. As a result, it matters not whether he lives or dies, as far as he is concerned his temporal life on earth and his eternal life in heaven is one and the same. He may continue to climb the mountain of a sun lit life, or he may walk through the valley of the shadow of death, either way he feels no pain for His life is "hid with Christ in God." Consider the three dominating features of a consecrated life:

I. The Principle of Resignation. "For me, be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live: If Jordan above me shall roll." The hymn writer is offering a prayer of petition for a consecrated life absolutely surrendered to the will of Christ. He is asking the Lord for grace if it be the will of God that "Jordan above [him] shall roll". Jordan is a river that is geographically critical in the history of ancient Israel. It divided the "wilderness" from the "land flowing with milk and honey" and was crossed by the children of Israel as they entered into their promised possession. (Josh. 3) This river is used by the hymn writer as a figure to illustrate the passage of death from the earth's wilderness to the heavenly mansions. The hymn writer has basically relinquished control of his life by resigning his will unto Christ. Until we sign a letter of resignation and hand it over to the Lord, we will never be able to live a consecrated life in Christ. "To whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are." (Rom. 6:16)

II. The Power of Sanctification. "No pang shall be mine, for in death as in life." The hymn writer now hangs his petition on the scaffolding of a confession. His surrender to the governance of Christ necessarily resulted in separating him unto "the path's of righteousness for His name's sake." As he embraced a sanctified life in Christ, so he assures himself of a sanctified death in Christ. He is emboldened to say, "no pang (pain) shall be mine", for the reign of Christ in the heart furnishes the soul with a cushion to soften the blow of pain experienced in life and death! "O death, where is thy sting?" (1 Cor. 15:55)

III. The Promise of Consolation. "Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul." The hymn writer has offered his petition and constructed his confession. He now receives an answer. Ah, but he is surrounded by the noise of a busy world; he is engulfed by the voices of family, friends and foes; he is overwhelmed by the echoes of demonic hauntings rumbling through the darkness of the unknown; and he hears the sound of his own sinful heart taunting him to fear death and doubt God. Can this uproar of clamour drown out the voice of God? No, for even with a "whisper" the majestic voice of Christ comforts the soul, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you...Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." (Jn. 14:27)

Day 2: Gaining a Perspective on Life and Death

"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."—Phil. 1:21

Introduction: These twelve words encapsulate the quintessence of Christianity in what would require 1200 words by the average Christian. The statement compresses together the central truths regarding a consecrated life in Christ without compromising the expansive implications such a life entails. It is a compendium of practical theology that is conducive to a simple creed on the Christian faith. Its brevity must not be mistaken for barrenness. Its length of words has no bearing on its depth of truth. Although it is short, it is not shallow. A well with an eight foot diameter may appear minuscule compared to a lake, yet upon closer examination the well runs much deeper than a lake and its water supply cannot be measured. Yes, we have a "well of truth" in this statement and it is our joy to drop the bucket of meditation and pull the water of life from its deep reservoir. We begin our meditation by gaining a perspective on life and death. Consider:

I. The Certainties of Life and Death. "To live...to die." Amidst all the uncertainties that attack a person's frame of mind, there are two things that every person may be entirely sure: the life he now lives and the death he will soon experience. The life he now lives bears undeniable evidence that his existence on this earth is real. From the physical evidence of his body through pleasure and pain; to the mental evidence of his brain through knowledge and understanding; extending to the emotional evidence of his heart through joy and grief; he is led to the conclusion that life is not just a delusion of the mind or a dream of imagination - it is real. Likewise, although he has never experienced death himself, he nevertheless has witnessed the death of family and friends. When his loved one's lungs stops breathing, when his loved one's heart stops pumping, when his loved one's mind stops functioning, when his loved one's affections express themselves no more, when his loved one's eyes glaze over with a gray film of barrenness, he knows death is as real as life and it is certain he will one day be engulfed by its inevitable shadow.

II. The Meaning of Life and Death. "To live is Christ, and to die is gain." The mere certainty of life and death may paint a bleak picture of existence. In order to capture a true picture of life and death, we must pass from the question of *whether* man exists, to the more pressing query of *why* he exists. The *matter of existence* naturally leads to an investigation on the *meaning of existence*. The inquiry uncovers yet a further aspect to life and death which is at first obscured. It was assumed life and death are wrapped up in the existence of a body animated with a mental capacity and emotional quality. Now, if life is purely a physical entity, we may have reason to despair, for in this case the meaning of life begins and ends in a world of beginnings and endings without meaning. On the other hand, when we begin scratching at the surface of the physical framework, we discover a spiritual nature that not only enlivens the body and mind, but also elevates man above that of all other creatures. For indeed, when God created man, He "formed man of the dust of ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." (Gen. 2:7) Thus, the Apostle Paul looks at himself as a person "created by [Christ], and for [Christ]" (Col. 1:16); yet as a sinner who has rebelled against Christ, has also been "redeemed by the blood of Christ" (1 Pet. 1:18,19); that he may now rejoice in the meaning of life, for he joyfully testifies, "for to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

Day 3: Generating a Value for Life and Death

"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."—Phil. 1:21

Introduction: How much is a life worth? What is the value of a death? Tears are shed with joy when a baby is born and they are poured forth with grief when a friend dies. Why do emotions run so deep on both occasions? Perhaps these incidents resonate with us, not only because a birth reminds us of our own entrance into the world, but also because a death awakens within us the reality of our own mortality and exit from this world. Moreover, do not births and deaths also enable us to appreciate the value of life? It was this consideration that prompted Moses to pray, "Teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." (Ps. 90:12) It is amazing how much £10 is worth when it is the only money in our possession. Likewise, it is astonishing how valuable just ten minutes is worth to a person who only has ten more minutes to live. So Moses is asking the Lord to teach him to value every day with the greatest worth since it may be his last. If time is appraised with such value in order to enjoy the duration of life on the earth, then how much more valuable is life itself? The Apostle Paul indicated this sentiment when he testified, "For to me to live in Christ, and to die is gain."

Implications: There are several implications pronounced in Paul's testimony that help us evaluate how much a life is worth. First, life is mysterious. This is necessarily implied by the very idea of life and death, for no one but God fully understands the complexities of a human being which is itself a distinctive mark of hidden value. Second, life is unique. Paul specifies "for me", as if to say that while human beings share the same physical and spiritual natures, each person is nevertheless different from all others, and it is this speciality that adds value to a life. Third, life is precious. Paul says "For to me to live." The alternative to life is non-existence. No matter how painful a person's life might be, pain itself is a greater blessing than non-existence. Life must be cherished in all its conditions. Fourth, life is fragile. Paul says "For me...to die." It is truly a sad sight to see a person who was once full of strength and energy sucked dry of vitality whose body is only a broken shell of its former glory. Ah, but that we would be willing to give ourselves as the greatest sacrifice in exchange for our loved one's health is evidence how much value we give to a life. Fifth, life is awe-inspiring. Paul says, "For me to live is Christ". As if the human body and soul were not glorious enough in their own right, the excellence of beauty is "Christ in [us], the hope of glory." Sixth, life is a gift. Paul says, "and to die is gain." If we receive more in death than in life, then it is implied that life is itself a gift that only increases with blessings through death.

Conclusion: Oskar Schindler was a German businessman who saved eleven hundred Polish Jewish Refugees during the Holocaust of World War II. He paid for their employment and put them to work in his factories where shelter, food and protection was secured. This story was dramatized in the 1993 movie entitled "Schindler's List". At the end of the war Schindler becomes a fugitive for crimes in slave labour. As he walks to his car surrounded by the eleven hundred rescued Jews, a ring, made secretly from the tooth fillings of the Jewish workers, was handed to him. Inscribed in Hebrew from the Talmud read, "For whoever saves one life saves the world entire." (Breaking down in shame, Schindler weeps that he could have saved at least one more life in exchange for a simple gold pin attached to his lapel.) Life is worth more than the value most of us set upon it. What is the worth of your life and what is the value of death?

Day 4: Governing a Life in Prospect of Death

"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."—Phil. 1:21

Introduction: Government is usually relegated to the arena of a nation's political parties and their mutual struggle for dominance in setting the agenda for new policies. However, government exists on many levels beginning with the absolute reign of God Who is "righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works". (Ps. 145:17) The Righteous Lord extends authority to all other levels of social order starting with a person's individual life and expanding outwards to the family, in the church, among the local community and finally stretching over an entire country. Each social structure is overseen by some form of government. The Apostle Paul is testifying that his life as an individual is governed by the absolute rule of Jesus Christ, for he says, "to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Let us examine the form of government that should rule in each of our lives.

I. Unrighteous Government. Not all forms of governments are good, neither are all governors righteous. When we apply this truth to an individual, both problems exist simultaneously. First, man establishes for himself a form of self-government wherein he attempts to regulate his life according to a variety of policies. For instance, he presumes to manage his life based on the acquirement of possessions, or the gratification of earthly pleasures, or the successful advancements of his profession, or the gaining and maintaining of family and friends. Second, man is a sinful creature who abuses every common benefit provided him by God. For instance, although the above policies are not morally wrong in themselves, they are nevertheless perverted by the sinfulness of man. Instead of making these policies a means to enjoying God through them, sinful man makes them an end to enjoy himself in them. Thus, sinful man subtracts God from the management of his life and establishes himself as the end of all happiness and meaning. In so doing, he not only hurts himself, but becomes injurious to others and offensive to God. Not only are these policies insufficient to provide for man a true infrastructure with which to govern his life, but his whole approach to self-management is false as he presumes to govern without God, yea, as a rebel against God.

II. Righteous Government. The only righteous government is that ordained of God. The Apostle Paul pulls together the essential qualities of divine government for an individual when he says, "For to me to live is Christ". Notice, he does not say, "for me to live is *in* Christ", or "for me to live is *for* Christ", or "for me to live is *through* Christ". Although all of these distinctions are be true, Paul is emphasizing the singular truth that for him to live IS Christ. This is an expression of entire consecration. His life was so closely conformed to that of Christ that his very identity as an individual was engulfed by his identity in the Lord. Paul shared a similar testimony with the church in Galatia when he said, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me, and gave Himself for me." (Gal. 2:20) Ultimately, Paul managed his life in accordance with the government of Christ who reigned supreme in his life. As a result, it was his blessing to "lay up for [himself] treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where [his] treasure [was], there [was his] heart also." (Matt. 5:19-21) For this reason, he could confidently conclude, "for me to live is Christ, and do die is gain."

Day 5: Governing a Death in Prospect of Life

"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."—Phil. 1:21

Introduction: While many people recognize the importance of living under the best form of government for life management, relatively few people give the same credence in managing their eventual deathbed experience. Is it not wise for us to ask the question: How do we hope to pass through the valley of the shadow of death? We may find some temporary comfort in removing such thoughts from our minds and perhaps even acquire some provisional solace in simply hoping for the best, but there can be no permanent security in the face of death until we look death in the face. Now, the Apostle Paul helps us to confront death when he says, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." He uncovers an interesting truth by linking together death and life. Just as we learned from Day 4 that life should be managed in prospect of death, so the reversal of this equation is true: the inevitable experience of death should be managed by the consideration of our present life. Consider:

I. The Preparations for Death. Imagine going to the airport only to arrive at the ticket counter with the realization you forgot to bring your bags and passport. Not only would you be unprepared for the trip, you would also be prevented from leaving the country. It would be a very sad experience to arrive at the threshold of death, only to realize you have not laid up treasures in heaven or received a passport for entrance. It is essential, therefore, that we "examine [ourselves], whether [we] be in the faith" (1 Cor. 13:5), which faith is founded on the Lord Jesus Christ, for He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me." (Jn. 14:6) If Jesus Christ is your Lord and Saviour, then we may move forward in our preparations by considering that: (1) Death is a journey that is lonely, for each person must walk the path alone; (2) Death is a journey that is fearful, for it involves a transition that includes many unknown factors; (3) Death is a journey that is separating, for it severs not only our link from this physical world of time and matter, but also our attachments to family and friends; (4) Death is a journey that is definite, for we must all pass through the valley unless we are blessed to meet Jesus in the air upon His return to this earth. Ah, but we make our preparations not only in considering these daunting features, but more importantly, in cultivating our confidence in Christ. For "[He] will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5); and "though [you] walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you will fear no evil: for [He is] with [you]" (Ps. 23:4); and though you may be separated from the familiarity of this present world, yet "[you] have in heaven a better and an enduring substance" (Heb. 12:23); so that while death is most definite, yet so is "eternal life." (1 Jn. 5:11)

II. The Legacy of Death. What do tombstones, obituaries and biographies have in common? They all provide a summary on the kind of legacy a person has achieved in his lifetime. Paul's legacy was summed up in one word - Christ. How did he achieve Christ? Actually, his legacy was what Christ achieved through him. Did Paul enjoy a greater legacy than a life united with Christ? Yes, it was a death united with Christ, for he says not only, "to me to live is Christ", but also, "to die is gain". For there shall be no more sin to molest, no more fears to unsettle, no more Satan to attack, no more grief to bear, no more burdens to carry, no more trials to traverse, no more storms to navigate, no more toils that weary. Through death we shall meet our Saviour face to face wherein He shall perfect us in true holiness and purity. O glorious day that will be!

Supplement: J. C. Ryle on Consecration

Christ is all in the sanctification of His people.

I would not have anyone misunderstand me. I do not mean for a moment to undervalue the work of the Spirit. But this I say, that no man is ever holy till he comes to Christ and is united to Him. Till then his works are dead works, and he has no holiness at all. — First you must be joined to Christ, and then you shall be holy. “Without Him — separate from Him — you can do nothing.” (John xv. 5.)

And no man can grow in holiness except he abides in Christ. Christ is the great root from which every believer must draw his strength to go forward. The Spirit is His special gift, His purchased gift for His people. A believer must not only “receive Christ Jesus the Lord,” but “walk in Him, and be rooted and built up in Him.” (Col. ii. 6, 7.)

Would you be holy? Then Christ is the manna you must daily eat, like Israel in the wilderness of old. Would you be holy? Then Christ must be the rock from which you must daily drink the living water. Would you be holy? Then you must be ever looking unto Jesus — looking at His cross, and learning fresh motives for a closer walk with God — looking at His example, and taking Him for your pattern. Looking at Him, you would become like Him. Looking at Him, your face would shine without your knowing it. Look less at yourself and more at Christ, and you will find besetting sins dropping off and leaving you, and your eyes enlightened more and more every day. (Heb. xii. 2; 2 Cor. iii. 18.)

The true secret of coming up out of the wilderness is to come up “leaning on the Beloved.” (Cant. viii. 5.) The true way to be strong is to realize our weakness and to feel that Christ must be all. The true way to grow in grace is to make use of Christ as a fountain for every minute’s necessities. We ought to employ Him as the prophet’s wife employed the oil — not only to pay our debts, but to live on also. We should strive to be able to say, “The life that I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.” (2 Kings iv. 7; Gal. ii. 20.)

I pity those who try to be holy without Christ! Your labour is all in vain. You are putting money in a bag with holes. You are pouring water into a sieve. You are rolling a huge round stone uphill. You are building up a wall with untempered mortar. Believe me, you are beginning at the wrong end. You must come to Christ first, and He shall give you His sanctifying Spirit. You must learn to say with Paul, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” (Phil. iv. 13.)