

I Counted...And I Count

Samuel Logan Brengle:

The Apostle Paul, in his young and fiery manhood, was on the way to Damascus, breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples,' when Jesus met him and won his heart; and from that day Paul counted all things loss for Christ. He made an unconditional surrender, and found such loveliness and grace in Jesus that he lost his heart to Him, and from that day consecrated and devoted his whole life to the Master. Long years afterwards he wrote, 'What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.'

Youth is the time for the steps that shape all future life. The man who does not make such a consecration in youth is not likely to make it at all. Age is prudent, cautious, and oftentimes timid and fearful. Youth is generous and hopeful, courageous, daring, unentangled, willing to take risks, and unafraid.

Youth is not held back by prudence and caution. Youth sees visions and is prepared to make sacrifices to realize the vision -- to transform it into something substantial that can be touched, handled, and used.

But by and by age approaches, with its cares and infirmities and weariness and insomnia, its deferred hopes and unfulfilled ambitions, its large knowledge of the complex and massed and seemingly invincible forces of evil, and with age comes the temptation to slow down, to compromise, to question the wisdom of having burned all the bridges behind, to draw back, or to hold back part of the price.'

No doubt Paul was so tempted; but it is also certain that he met the temptation squarely and in the open, for he declared to the Philippians and to the ages: 'I counted..... and I count.' He counted the cost in the past, and he continued to count as he began. 'I counted..... and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse (margin R.V.) that I may win Christ and be found in Him.' He obeyed the word of Jesus, 'Remember Lot's wife.' He had put his hand to the plow, and he never looked back.

It was here that wise King Solomon failed. In his youth he had visions; he was humble, he sought the Lord and walked in His way, he obtained promises and was prospered; but in his age he went astray, his consecration failed, the vision was dimmed, the glory departed, and great and sad was his fall.

It was at this point that Ananias and Sapphira failed. They had given themselves to the Lord, but later they conspired to hold back 'part of the price,' and perished in their hypocritical falsehood. It was a withdrawal of this kind on the part of Demas that so hurt the heart of Paul when he wrote: 'Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.'

It is only a consecration like Paul's -- Unconditional, complete, and sustained to the end -- that will satisfy a man's own soul, meet the infinite claims of Jesus, and answer the awful needs of a world weltering in pride and lust and covetousness and sin.

1. Men sink to what is low, mean, and devilish, but they can never themselves be satisfied with such things. A man may be gratified with that which is base, but he can be satisfied only by the highest. 'Thou, O God, hast made us for Thyself, and we are restless till we rest in Thee.' (St. Augustine.)

William Booth as a boy might have sold himself to sinful pleasures and enjoyed them to the full, but he would not have been satisfied. He might have engaged in business and become a money-getter; he might have built up a fortune and rolled in wealth, but he would not have been satisfied. He might have entered the navy or army and become a great military leader and hero, or he might have plunged into politics and risen to the premiership and guided the destinies of the British Empire, but he would not have been so satisfied as he was in following Jesus to save the lost and 'turn them to a pardoning God.' He, too, counted all things loss for Christ, and continued so to count them to the end of his long and laborious life. It was only by such complete and sustained consecration that he could be satisfied with himself. A man's own soul demands this; his soul will not be trifled with nor put off with paltry excuses when he sits alone with his conscience, as some day he surely must.

I sat alone with my conscience,
In a place where time had ceased,
And we talked of my former living
In the land where the years increased;
And I felt I should have to answer

The questions it put to me,
And to face the question and answer
Throughout an eternity.

The ghosts of forgotten actions
Came floating before my sight,
And things that I thought had perished Were alive with a terrible might;
And the vision of life's dark record
Was an awful thing to face,
Alone with my conscience sitting
In that solemnly silent place.

2. It is only by such uttermost and sustained consecration that we can satisfy the imperious claims of Jesus -- claims not of an arbitrary will, but of infinite love. He does not compel us to follow Him; He invites us to do so, with the understanding that if we choose to follow, we must gird ourselves for lifelong service and uttermost devotion and sacrifice. 'There is no discharge in that war.' Jesus says: ' If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me.' 'Think not that I am come to send peace on the earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of Me. And he that taketh not his cross. and followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me. He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it.'

No power compels us to follow Jesus in this way, but we can follow Him no other way. We deceive ourselves if we think we can follow Him in any other spirit than these passages describe.

I may stand at a distance, and admire Him, applaud Him, and protest that I am this and that I love Him but I do not follow Him unless I take up my cross and bear it to the end.

This is His own standard for those who wish to serve Him. There are so -- called Christians who think a mere formal recognition of Him while their hearts are set upon money-getting, or ambitions of their own, sufficient; but He demands Soldiers willing to lose all for His cause on earth.

He is a 'Man of War' as well as 'The Prince of Peace,' and no world conqueror ever required of his followers such absolute heart loyalty as does Jesus; and He must require this, for He is 'the Way'; and since there is no other way -- we must follow Him or perish. No one compels another to become an aviator, but once a man chooses himself to become an aviator, he must obey the laws of aviation, or fail and Jesus is "the Truth," and truth is utterly rigorous and imperious in its claims. We cannot juggle with the truth of the multiplication table. We either follow it or we do not. There is no middle ground. Call it arbitrary if you will, get angry and vex your soul over it if you will, but the multiplication table changes not. It is truth, and you must adjust yourself to it. It cannot bend to you. So Jesus is 'the Truth'; He changes not, and we must adjust ourselves to Him, consecrate ourselves utterly to Him, and abide in Him, or we are none of His.

Jesus is 'the Life,' and life must not be trifled with lest it be lost. It can be lost, and its loss is irreparable. So we can lose Jesus -- and we shall lose Him if we prove unfaithful to Him -- if after having put our hand to the plow we turn back.

3. Finally, it is only by an utter and sustained consecration that we can meet the needs of the world about us. 'Ye are the salt of the earth,' said Jesus. Salt saves from corruption. True Christians alone save society from utter corruption. But if our consecration fail, we lose our savour, our saltiness, and society falls into rotteness.

Who can estimate the harm that is done to Christianity by half-hearted Christians? The world looks on at selfish, ignoble lives spent by those who claim to know Christ, and says, 'We see nothing in it. These people are just like ourselves.' No man said that of Paul, for they saw always in him a man who felt that Christ was worth leaving the whole world to gain.

'Ye are the light of the world,' said Jesus. Men would stumble and grope in unutterable darkness but for the light of the Cross. Womanhood is despised, childhood is neglected, manhood is depraved, terrifying superstitions reign, horrible cruelties abound, wherever Jesus is not known and followed; and the man who, having come to Him and taken up his cross to follow Him, now turns back, or fails in his consecration, not only sins against God and wrongs his own soul, but he commits a crime against humanity -- against the children

who are growing up and the generations yet unborn.

The soldier must be faithful unto death, otherwise he will dishonour himself and betray his country. Far more so must the Christian be true, for he is the light-bearer of eternal things, and if his light goes out -- if his consecration fails -- he will stumble on the dark mountains, and at last fall into a bottomless pit of outer darkness, and others will stumble and fall with him.

Paul did not fail. He never swerved in his onward course, never looked back. He rejoiced in his sufferings for Jesus' sake and for the sake of his fellow-men; and oh, how glad he must have been, how his heart must have exulted at the end, when he cried out: 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day!

And now, my reader, does all this seem hard? Well, that is because I have written about man's side only, and have said nothing about how the Lord will help and bless and comfort and inwardly strengthen you, if you are wholly His and continue so to the end. He who met Paul on the Damascus road will meet you and give you light. He who stood by Paul in prison and in shipwreck will stand by you. He will show you what He wants you to do, and empower you to overcome every difficulty if you will say to Him, Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?'

And then, at the end of the way there is the crown of life, the unspeakable rapture of His presence and love, the reunion with loved ones gone before, the triumph over every foe, the holy and exalted fellowship with those who have been faithful throughout the ages. It will be worth while to see and be associated with all the numberless saints who have overcome, having 'washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb.'

But what shame and remorse to be banished with the other crowd of traitors and cowards, of proud, unclean, selfish, faithless ones! In order to avoid that lot, let us, like Paul, count and continue to count all things but loss for Christ.