

Getting the Fire of God Back Into the Church

Throughout history the church has, at different times, emphasized power and neglected purity or emphasized purity and neglected the Biblical promise of power. It is not, however, an “either/or” proposition but “both/and.” Jesus linked the two together when he said, “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8).

If we are to successfully meet the challenges of this time in history we must have both the fruit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We cannot embrace one and neglect the other. We must have character if we expect the authority to command. We must embrace both purity and power for our lives today.

This was recently highlighted to me during a time of prayer when I inquired of the Lord as to why the American church seems so powerless in the face of the growing animosity and hostility to Biblical values. I was reminded of Samson in the Old Testament and immediately knew there was a God-given lesson from his life for the church today.

In the life of Samson we see purity and power merged together; but when there was a divorce of one from the other, he lost his power and his life.

Samson, the Secret of His Strength

Samson was consecrated as a Nazirite while in his mother's womb. “Nazirite” comes from the Hebrew word *nazir* meaning “consecrated” or “separated.” In regards to Samson, this was a vow that he would live a “separated” life unto God totally dedicated to His purpose.

It is obvious that this consecration was the secret of his power, for when he compromised his consecration by consorting

with Delilah and allowing his hair—the outward sign of his consecration—to be cut off, he lost his power.

Is it possible that the loss of consecration is also the reason the North American church is so powerless? Could this be the reason the American church, according to George Barna, is losing adherents and influence faster than any other American institution?

While he lived as a Nazirite in total consecration to God, Samson was invincible. On one occasion when the Philistines thought they had him locked up inside a city, he ripped the city gates from their posts and carried them to the top of a hill and left them. On another occasion when a large army came to apprehend him, he picked up a donkey's jawbone and killed one thousand enemy soldiers.

Then one day he let down his guard with a woman named Delilah, with whom he had fallen in love, not realizing she was actually an agent of the enemy to find the secret of his strength. After much cajoling and pleading, he finally told her of his Nazirite vow and how his long hair, that had never been cut, was the outward sign of this vow of consecration.

With her soothing words Delilah lulled Samson to sleep on her lap and then called for the Philistines waiting nearby who came and cut off his locks of hair. Delilah then said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson." He awakened and said, "I will go out as before and shake myself free." Judges 16:20 says, "He did not know that the LORD had left him."

Samson now stood powerless before his enemies who gouged out his eyes, bound him with shackles and put him to work grinding in the prison. What a pitiable turn of events for one that had been so mightily used of God.

What a powerful lesson for the modern church that needs to learn that there is a connection between the Lord's call to absolute surrender and His power and blessing in our lives.

The Call of Jesus to an Absolute Consecration to Him

Anyone who reads the gospels with an open mind will readily see that Jesus calls the multitudes to a Nazirite sort of consecration to Himself. It is a call to absolute surrender to His Lordship. Every other relationship and commitment must be subservient to the relationship with Him. This is the point of Luke 14:26 where He says, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life, he cannot be My disciple."

There is a sense of urgency in his call. When one person, for example, responded to His call saying, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father" (Luke 9:59), Jesus made it clear that commitment to follow Him far outweighs all other earthly commitments. He replied, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:60).

Jesus made clear His call to total consecration again in Luke 9:23-26 when he said, "If anyone will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever will save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it."

Let's face it! Only an egotistical madman or God Himself would call people to this sort of absolute commitment to himself. If, however, Jesus is God Incarnate (and we believe He is), then His call to absolute consecration to Himself makes perfect sense. Since He is the greatest and ultimate value in the universe, it is only reasonable that His call would demand an absolute commitment to Himself and His will.

When we consecrate our lives to Christ we thereby align ourselves with the ultimate power and good in the universe. Anything less would be irrational and unreasonable. By committing ourselves completely to Him, we thereby honor God and position ourselves to experience the eternal life and power He has planned for us.

For Jesus to have offered an option for something less than total commitment to Himself would have been to dishonor His own person and name. It would also have been a disservice to his hearers for it would have given them an option to choose something less than the very best God had planned for their lives

There is Hope for Today's Church

The early church lived in this kind of consecration to Jesus Christ, and this was the secret of its power. Paul probably spoke for Christians in general when he said, "For to me, to continue living is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). They faced ridicule, imprisonment and death for the name of Christ, without flinching. But in one generation, without modern technology, they impacted the Greco-Roman world and beyond for Christ.

The church today, however, is very much like Samson, shorn of her power, because she has compromised her consecration to God. As Samson became an object of jest and ridicule, so the church today has become an object of scorn and derision by the contemporary culture.

Even as Samson was lulled to sleep in the lap of Delilah, the modern charismatic church has been lulled to sleep in the lap of "self-help" sermons and "feel-good" theologies that cater to the flesh and encourage selfish lifestyles, rather than calling the people of God to give up everything for Christ and His call.

But there is hope. The account in Judges 16 tells us how Samson's hair began to grow as he toiled day after day in the prison. This was an outward sign that there was a renewal of his Nazirite consecration to God.

Then one day during a great celebration in a massive theater, the Philistines brought out Samson to entertain the gathered throng as an object mirth and ridicule. He was forced to

“perform” for the crowd so they could revel in the humiliation and devastation of the one who had caused them so much pain in the past.

But what they did not realize was that Samson’s hair had grown back—at least to a degree. His consecration had been renewed and there would now be one final display of God’s power through him.

After being put on display and mocked and ridiculed, a young man led the blind and broken Samson to a place between the two giant pillars that supported the stadium. Samson placed a hand on each pillar, and cried out to God, “Lord God, remember me I pray! Please strengthen me just this once!” (Judg. 16:28).

As Samson prayed, “Let me die with the Philistines” (v. 30), he pushed with all his might and the two pillars gave way. The temple/stadium came crashing down killing thousands of Philistines, and Samson.

Just as Samson renewed his Nazirite consecration and saw one final display of God’s power, I am convinced that the church today can see another display of divine power and awakening if we will consecrate ourselves to God once again.

There is a great example of the power of consecration from my own family history.

My Father Discovers the Power of Consecration

When my older brother, Pete, was 7 years old, he was run over by a farm tractor and fatally injured. With blood bubbling from his eyes, mouth, nose and ears, my dad rushed him to the nearest hospital. Three doctors examined him and agreed, “He won’t live more than 10 minutes.”

They went on to explain that, even apart from x-rays, they knew from the bleeding from all his passages that a broken rib had punctured a lung. They then wheeled Pete away for x-rays

and my dad was left alone with his thoughts and questions.

As he stood in silence, the thing foremost on his mind was that for 5 years he had ignored the call of God to give himself completely to Him in full-time ministry. He had told no one of this call, for with only a fourth grade education and a family to care for, it seemed an absolute impossibility that he could become a pastor or minister.

But facing the death of his young son he knew he had to respond. He, therefore, stepped into a nearby restroom and prayed a prayer of consecration. It was only three words, but those words came from the depth of his being. He raised his right hand and said, "Lord, I'm ready!" It was total surrender!

Immediately the power of God fell and the gift of faith dropped into his heart. I heard him tell this numerous times growing up, and in his words, "I knew Pete was going to be okay. I didn't know how I knew, but I knew."

He came out of the restroom and had to wait; but his heart was at peace and full of faith. After about one hour, one of the doctors emerged, called my dad, and said, "Mr. Hyatt, there has been a higher power here tonight." He then said, "I know your son had a broken rib that had punctured his lung. But we have finished the x-rays, the bleeding has stopped and there is not a broken bone in his body."

My dad's act of consecration and the ensuing miracle launched him into the ministry. His experience affirms the saying that God is not looking for ability but availability; for in spite of his lack of education and training, he went on to be a successful pastor for many years before his death in 1994. Just a few days ago a man who for many years attended the last church he pastored, posted this about him on Facebook:

The impact he had on my life changed me forever, and my children and I can always say that our Christian life was

helped framed by one of America's greatest pastors. If any man ever lived by God's highest standards, it was the legendary C. H. Hyatt. I miss one of the best friends I have ever had.

Concluding Thoughts

A stuttering, uneducated young man sitting in a church service heard the preacher say, "It is yet to be seen what God will do through the man [or woman] who will give himself completely to Him." Dwight L. Moody on hearing those words said in his heart, "I will be that man," and surrendered himself completely to God. He went on to become one of the most powerful evangelists and successful soul winners the church has ever known, and he was never ordained.

I am convinced that the key for the church in North America is a renewed consecration to God—placing Jesus and His interests first and foremost in our lives. In this new commitment, we realize that our life is no longer our own but we now live for His honor and for the advancement of His cause.

As we place all that we are and have at His disposal, I am convinced that we will see new demonstrations of His power, and the divine awakening that is so desperately needed in our land will spring forth. It will be as William Booth so eloquently expressed in his stirring hymn, Send the Fire:

"Oh, see us on Your altar lay
We give our lives to You today;
So crown the offering now we pray,
Send the fire today."

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