

Utter obedience

Jesus gave a clear and very sobering warning in his Sermon on the Mount: 'If . . . the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!' (Matthew 6:22).

We have all experienced the spiritual conflict that goes on in the heart and mind of a person who has seen something of God. Revelation has gripped our heart and we can no longer accept things as they are. There is something more, something better. Excitement begins to rise within us as we realise there is a call even upon *our* lives – even we have a destiny to fulfil.

Then the problems begin! Like the seed sown on rocky soil or among the thorns (Matthew 13:20-22), a conflict arises between the kingdom of God and the pressures of the world. If we aren't careful, compromise finds a place in us. Instead of a life filled with God and the truth of his Word, we can become clogged up with the cares of this world as it seeks to squeeze us back into its mould.

Often it creeps up on us unawares. We are halfway down that road before we realise what has happened. So how can we avoid getting into this situation? How can we ensure that the light within us remains light?

There is only one sure way, and it's costly: *complete and utter obedience to the Lord.*

'Where God wants me - job or no job'

The cost can take many forms, not least of which is a demand on our financial resources. It may be that to join those who are really moving with God demands a physical move. Just to be in the right church may mean leaving secure employment, a comfortable home or a pleasant location.

For Clifford it was all three. He had a prestigious and lucrative position in a company in Africa where he had worked for several years. Eventually, God called him and his wife Arlene to return to England. In obedience they returned, but it meant great upheaval and the financial costs were enormous. Leaving behind a large company house, servants, company cars and a huge salary - not to mention a very acceptable climate - they settled themselves in a small house in the Midlands and Clifford went back to university to do a further year's study.

They still had enough to live on, even though their income had dropped drastically. Clifford was unsure of what career move to make and, all in all, the first eighteen months were not easy. But they knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that they had done all God had asked of them - and believed he would honour their obedience.

They weren't disappointed. Not only did he bless the church through them, adding a whole new dimension of life to it as he used them in various forms of leadership, but he also provided for their needs over and above their expectations.

Clifford was offered an England-based position with the company he had worked for abroad. At first they wanted him to move to a city some eighty-five miles away, but Clifford was firm. 'This is where God has placed me, and this is where I'm staying,' he declared, 'job or no job.'

Stunned at his response, but eager to have him working for them again, the company contacted him a second time and

reoffered him the job, this time allowing him to be based at his home!

Now, living in a beautiful house and financially stable again, he and Arlene are fulfilling in the church all that God has called them to at this time. They could have refused God's call to return to England, excusing their disobedience by reasoning that it was far too much to ask of anybody. But they didn't. They put God first, despite the financial cost, and in return God put them first every time.

'But what about my reputation?'

Then there is the cost in personal reputation. We are probably well received and widely accepted in our current church circle. If we change allegiance, all that will end. We will have to start all over again, unknown, unrecognised and laying down (initially, at least) any ministry we may have considered ours.

But what about our friends? They certainly won't understand, and probably won't be sympathetic - they haven't seen what we have seen. But we can't just ignore longstanding relationships, can we?

When God's call comes we must be prepared to lay all these things down. God is not sadistic. He's a loving God who only takes away in order to build up and strengthen his people, who will now be ready to receive from him in greater measure than before.

We have already met Bob (the former church deacon). His whole life was geared to becoming a full-time minister, until the day God broke in on him and radically changed his view of things. From that moment on, only one course of action was available to him. Compromise wasn't even considered. Laying down his ministry, and disregarding the incomprehension and bitterness of those left behind, he marched purposefully on into the will of God.

In his current leadership role, Bob is a strength to God's people in many ways. Leaving was a wrench at the time, but

it was only a small price to pay for the 'greater thing' into which God was leading.

Such a person God can really take hold of and use. Such a person is open to the power of God's Spirit to shape and transform him.

It's not that he's perfect – he isn't. It's not that he found it easy to make his decision – he didn't. In fact, Bob had to call on God continually to strengthen him, show him the way through and enable him to deal with the antagonism. But through it all he was concerned with just one thing: doing what God wanted him to do.

That is all God asks of us.

The domino effect

Jesus urges us to count the cost. Financial cost, personal reputation, longstanding relationships – these are just some of the considerations. But the truth still stands that if we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all these things will be added to us anyway. We don't need to be worried about the whys and wherefores. All we need to do is be obedient to God and he'll take care of the rest.

Sadly, however, there are still some who seem to have more faith in the problem confronting them than in God's promise to supply all their needs. When the light within us begins to dim, we start making decisions based on the situation rather than on our revelation of God.

Imagine a person who has been introduced to a 'new' biblical truth – the baptism in the Holy Spirit, for example. With the eye of faith he sees and accepts his need for the Holy Spirit. He begins to reach out for it, but encounters opposition from the people in his local church. Captured by the call of God, he is all set to leave his church and join one where the baptism in the Holy Spirit is taught and practised.

Then comes the opposition. First from the few friends in whom he has excitedly confided, then from the minister himself,

who has personally rejected the Holy Spirit. Warnings range from 'the work of the devil' to 'it's a thing of the past, not valid today'. As he allows the pressures to intrude on his thinking his original faith begins to waver.

The once radiant beams of inspiration begin to fade. As more obstacles begin to present themselves, clouds of uncertainty start to roll in and he begins to fear the cost of embracing this new-found truth.

The new church is twenty miles away – costly in terms of time and money. And he knows no-one there very well, while at his current church he has close friends and is respected as a man of some standing. Does he really want to give it all up?

As this destructive pattern of thought continues, the long shadows of doubt are almost welcome as they conspire to convince him that he is doing rather well where he is. Does he really need to get himself involved with this dodgy idea? The black night of unbelief finally overtakes him as he settles back into the darkness of disobedience to God's once clear call to move on.

The light that was in him has become darkness – and how dark it has become! No longer motivated by what he once saw, he can now only justify his position by opposing it. Not entering in himself, he is a hindrance to those who would enter (Luke 11:52).

Not a pleasant picture, and perhaps a bit far-fetched, you may say. But it happens! How easily we allow the problem, rather than God, to rule our thinking. Once we allow it to dominate us, the domino effect takes over and one thing topples after another.

Don't fool yourself

The apostle Paul once confronted the Galatian Christians. The converts from his ministry in Galatia had begun well in the dynamism of the Holy Spirit but were now succumbing to pressure from proselytising legalists. Dead religious form was

threatening to stifle the living, righteous freedom which Jesus had won.

To Paul, this was falling from grace, moving into deception – an act of desperate foolishness. ‘You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?’ he cried (Galatians 3:1).

Having been liberated by Jesus they were again subjecting themselves to the yoke of bondage. They were going back into what they had come out of. And Paul did not baulk at describing what that would mean from his point of view: ‘If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a law-breaker’ (Galatians 2:18).

When we are diverted from the highway of God’s purpose back into the byway from which we came, we are in danger. Throwing our energies back into what we once determined to forsake is not just inconsistent but unrighteous. We prove ourselves to be transgressors. We may throw ourselves back into the old ways with renewed dedication. We may work with determined energy. But in the end it is nothing more than the outworking of a deep-rooted desperation.

We are fooling ourselves – and in the quiet moments, if we are honest, we know it. We know that we are trying to make something work that we have no real faith to see succeed. And the Word of God confronts us with: ‘Everything that does not come from faith is sin’ (Romans 14:23).

Maybe we do believe on a good day – when the sun is shining, the wind is in the right direction and everything in the garden looks lovely. Perhaps it’s only on the bad days, when we’ve had to take off our rose-tinted spectacles, that our despair gives way to depression.

But Scripture has a word for the person in that condition. He is called ‘double-minded . . . unstable in all he does’. The only thing he can be sure of is that he won’t receive anything from the Lord (James 1:6-7).

So don’t fool yourself. If you can’t proceed down that road in faith, heed the ‘No Entry’ signs. Instead, go where faith draws you. Follow hard where it can flourish. And don’t even begin to think, ‘Yes, I know I should, but . . .’ The Word of God says:

'My righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him' (Hebrews 10:38).

Again, the sharp two-edged sword of the Word cuts through the thoughts and intentions of our hearts, leaving us exposed and without excuse, when it states: 'To the one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin' (James 4:17 NASB).

One excuse after another

Teresa knew 'the right thing to do' but she put forward one excuse after another to avoid doing it.

Raised a Roman Catholic, she had attended a Catholic church for thirty-six years before she came to know Jesus personally. Not long after, she received the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Through her involvement with a prayer group, with a community specialising in the healing ministry and with a woman from another church who became a close friend, her spiritual growth was rapid. She attended her friend's church on several occasions and eventually God asked her to move there permanently.

'I was more and more dissatisfied and unhappy at my old church,' she related. 'Not many were interested in moving on with God. It had become so unreal compared to what I'd been experiencing, and I'd begun to question the reality of what was happening there. Even so, the decision was a difficult one to make. I had been so much a Catholic, and I raised before God every argument possible for staying where I was.

' "It wouldn't be fair on my father," I thought. He had just moved to be near us because of his health, and went to church with me every week. "The children won't like it. The new church is fifteen miles away and my husband won't stand for it. I won't fit in at the new place - I'm not the right sort of person. And if I stay where I am I can have an effect for God on the people I see every Sunday."

'But none of my arguments held water in the light of what

I knew God was saying, and he gently but firmly showed me I was wrong.

'God immediately provided my father with an alternative lift to church and now his faith is becoming real and alive. The children, now they have settled, love it – and the teaching they are getting is practical and relevant.

'To my absolute amazement, my non-Christian husband approved of the change, even though the Sunday meeting meant spending a whole morning away from home instead of just an hour. And I realised that I did fit in at the new church. My friend had moved away by this time, which was sad, but there was so much love for me there, and acceptance of me for who I was, that I really felt I'd come home.

'As for staying put to be a light in my old church, I soon saw that most of them didn't want to change at all. I've had more effect on people who don't know God at all than I've had on them.'

Fortunately for Teresa, she didn't allow the doubts to obscure what she had seen. Yes, there had been resistance, the circumstances conspiring to dissuade her from obeying God. But as she remained open to the Lord, he showed her the way through each apparent obstacle.

Her final comment? 'Don't be afraid. The devil's lies are powerful, but don't let him stop you coming into a Spirit-filled church and reaching for the abundance of all that God has for you. Had I known then what I know now, I would never have hesitated.'

Prize or compromise?

What I have tried to do in these last two chapters is dispel the false and dangerous reasoning that compromise is a godly solution. Once and for all I want to pull down the idea that in the kingdom of God it is legitimate to go for the soft option or take the attitude of 'Anything for the sake of a quiet life'.

Compromising over convictions implanted in you by the Holy

Spirit and accommodating ideas contrary to God's Word is nothing less than bad, old-fashioned *sin*. Not only is it ungodly – it is downright dangerous. Such active disobedience to God will, in the end, disqualify you from receiving all that could have been yours by way of eternal reward.

Closely linked with compromise is negligence, another subtle robber of reward, and just as big an enemy to destiny as disobedience. Remember, it was to the church, not the world, that the warning was addressed: 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?' (Hebrews 2:3 NASB).

You may not be neglecting the wonderful fact that you are saved, but are you neglecting the greatness of the salvation into which you have come?

Don't be content with less than all God has for you. There may be a great price to pay – but there is a glorious prize to win!