

Living in the Light of the Word — 4 Unswerving Obedience

For the last three issues, we've focused on this passage:

- ²⁰*My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words.*
²¹*Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart;*
²²*for they are life to those who find them and health to a man's whole body.*
²³*Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.*
²⁴*Put away perversity from your mouth; keep corrupt talk far from your lips.*
²⁵*Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you.*
²⁶*Make level paths for your feet and take only ways that are firm.*
²⁷*Do not swerve to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil.*
Proverbs 4:20-27

How do we live in the light of the Word?

Last issue we looked at this under three headings: Concerning our *mouth*, uncorrupted speech (v24); Concerning our *eyes*, undistracted focus (v25); Concerning our *feet*, unwearying stability (v26). We have one last heading: Concerning our direction, unswerving obedience.

Obedience

A river meanders, progressing gently in twists and turns. Conversely, a railway line ploughs straight, through tunnel and embankment, neither permitting its progress to be parried nor its direction deflected. If our focus is flexibility, the river may be our model. But if the danger is compromise, our model is the railway line.

The ability to move in a straight line is to be prized. It takes strength, courage, care, singularity and determination.

So be careful to do what the LORD your God has commanded you; do not turn aside to the right or to the left.

Deuteronomy 5:32

Do not turn aside from any of the commands I give you today, to the right or to the left, following other gods and serving them.

Deuteronomy 28:14

Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.

Joshua 1:7

It's much easier to disobey. It's easier to yield and bend and twist and turn. The river after all has historically developed along the path of least resistance. That path will take it *somewhere*, eventually to the sea. But what if the sea is not to be our destination? First our intended destination should be established, and then the appropriate course set. If we stay on the course, we reach the destination. If we turn away to the left or the right, we'll arrive *somewhere*, but

in all likelihood we'll be in the wrong place. Obedience involves overcoming resistance.

Solomon

King David was a big act to follow. He was known as a man after God's own heart. He had served the Lord with wholeheartedness. Who could adequately replace him? Who could fill his shoes? Someone had to be the successor, but from a natural point of view it was not an enviable task. Better to let someone fail at it and then succeed *him!*

But David knew who his successor was to be. He also knew the great task that that one was to perform, the task of building the Temple. Having acknowledged Solomon as successor, David smoothed the way and made it easy for him. He developed the plans, made the preparations and gathered the materials. There was a brief period when Adonijah put himself forward and was proclaimed king, but the old king was alerted to this, and duly established Solomon.

Wholeheartedness

David publicly charged Solomon to wholehearted devotion:

"And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever.

1 Chronicles 28:9

Solomon *heard* it.

Later, again publicly, King Solomon prayed:

O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below — you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way.

1 Kings 8:23

Solomon *knew* it.

At the end of this prayer, Solomon addressed the people, ending with these words:

But your hearts must be fully committed to the LORD our God, to live by his decrees and obey his commands, as at this time.

1 Kings 8:61

Solomon *taught* it.

There were good times, times of accomplishment and splendour. But later in Solomon's reign we read:

King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter — Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods." Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other

gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites. So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done.

1 Kings 11:1-6

Solomon apparently *forgot* it!

So we have the four stages: Solomon *heard*, he *knew*, he *taught*, he *forgot*.

Perhaps the fourth stage would be better expressed, "Solomon decided not to remember." In any event, his obedience gave way. He deviated from the straight path, and began to follow the meanderings of the river. He had started well — but it's how you finish that counts.

No Compromise

We all tend to have a way of believing the Bible and obeying the Bible that *works* — but not when it would stop me doing what I really want to do. Then I become convinced that what I really want to do surely isn't *bad*, and surely God won't mind. And before I have the clarity to see the compromise, I've stopped laying track and I'm in the meanderings of the river.

Often for us, as for Solomon, it's in the area of love and women or men that we're led away from unswerving obedience. So we adulterate the Word, we mix it with something else, because of what we *want* to do and how we *want* it to read.

Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.

Joshua 1:7

It takes strength and courage to obey, particularly if we want *not* to.

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ

Titus 2:11-13

Solomon detoured, but it wasn't inevitable — ultimately, it was his choice. He could have served wholeheartedly, and maintained a straight course to his destination. In the same way, we have a grace available that enables us not to veer off or give up, but to keep on the straight track all the way to the end of the line. We can *choose* to follow with unswerving obedience.

In the Light of the Word

Taking it all together, how do we live in the light of the Word?

Concerning our *mouth*, uncorrupted speech. Out of a guarded heart, we can take responsibility and *choose* to live in the light of the Word as regards our speaking.

Concerning our *eyes*, undistracted focus. By maintaining our focus and keeping our gaze fixed directly before us, we can *choose* to live in the light of the Word as regards our looking.

Concerning our *feet*, unwearying stability. By considering the right course and taking only ways that are firm, we can *choose* to live in the light of the Word as regards our walking.

Concerning our *direction*, unswerving obedience. By taking the courage to maintain wholeheartedness, and with our eye on the destination, we can continue the uncompromising course, and *choose* to live in the light of the Word as regards our obeying.

Let's live in the light of the Word!

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Note: All Bible quotations are NIV unless otherwise stated.