

Russell Kelfer

**Immediate
Obedience:
The Performance**

**515-A
Series: Obedience**

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly “hear” his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It’s been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that’s a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you “hear” as you read.

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IN REVIEW- PROMISES AND GOD'S WORD

We continue the series of lessons on living the Christian life. It all began with a series from the book of Joshua. We have been looking at Joshua 1:8-9 these last five lessons as we have been dealing with the principles of the Christian experience. The Christian has been promised spiritual prosperity. The Christian has been promised spiritual success. The Christian has been promised victory over the enemy. We saw in Joshua 1:5 that "No man shall be able to stand before you." The Christian has been promised direction. Joshua has been told by God, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."¹ The Christian has then been commanded to have courage and strength.

As we look at these precious promises and great commands, we ask ourselves how we are supposed to do it. The central focus of verses 8 and 9 says that we are to have the Word of God on the tip of our tongue. For a few lessons we dealt with the principles of how we get the Word of God on the tip of our tongue. In verse 8a we read,

"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth,"
(NKJV)

In other words, it ought to stay there continually. It ought to be such that whenever you open your mouth that the Word has so saturated your life that it comes forth freely and naturally. It involves being readily received and immediately available.

We realized, when we continued looking at these verses, that memorizing or having the Word saturating our lives is not an end within itself so that we can sit around with our friends and brag about how much Scripture we have memorized. The key is not what we know. The key is that we are to memorize Scripture for one purpose.

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but
you shall meditate in it day and night... (NKJV)

¹ Hebrews 13:5 (NKJV)

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The reason we memorize and lay the Word of God in our hearts is single-fold, that we might meditate in it day and night. The purpose of putting the Word in our hearts is so that it can be there continually for the purpose of meditation.

We took two or three lessons to meditate together as a class in order to understand the concept of meditation. We looked at what it means to meditate on the Word and came to the conclusion that it involves concentration, evaluation, reiteration and appropriation. We meditated through some verses and realized that meditation takes the characteristics of man, and by looking at Jesus, translates them into the character of God through transformation.

The purpose of meditation is also not an end within itself. We memorize so that we might meditate, but we meditate for one reason. The reason is continued in verse 8.

that you may observe to do according to all that is written
in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then
you will have good success. (NKJV)

In other words, the reason we memorize is so that we can meditate. The reason we meditate is so that we might be able to have that which is needed to be perfectly obedient to the will of God. In other words, obedience is the key to this whole subject. It is a simple word. It is a simple principle. But, I believe obedience is the basic stumbling blocks in the Christian life.

IN REVIEW: THE PERSPECTIVE OF OBEDIENCE

We defined obedience in the last lesson. *Obedience is responding to knowledge by following instruction.* You cannot obey something you do not know to obey, but when you do know it, it means you simply do it. The concept of obedience is dealt with in this series in basically four ways. The first is the perspective of obedience. How does God look at our need to be obedient? In order to get God's perspective of obedience we need to see from the Scripture how He looks at it. There are four principles that apply here.

Principle 1- Total Obedience. God's standards have not changed. His goal is total, perfect obedience. If you want to be in the perfect will of God, you need to be totally obedient in what you know to do. This has not changed. We looked at James 1:22-25 in the last lesson. These verses tell us that when we look into the

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mirror of the Word and go away without obeying it, it is exactly like looking into the mirror in the morning then walking away and forgetting what you just saw. James says, "Don't be hearers of the Word but doers." Hear it and then respond to it by obedience.

Principle 2- God's measuring stick of our love for Him is strictly how obedient we are to the known will of God. You say, "Well, the Lord gauges my love for Him by what I do, by the sacrifice of my life." That is not what it says in John 14 verses 15 and 21. Jesus says,

"If you love Me, keep My commandments.

He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself [make Myself known] to him.

Then in John 15 verses 10 and 14 Jesus says,

If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.

You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.

(NKJV)

So obedience is God's measuring stick for our love for Him.

Principle 3- God expects more of us as we learn more. His expectation is relative to our accountability. The more you learn as you read this lesson, sit in a class, or listen to a lesson on tape, the more you are accountable to obey this principle than before. If you listen to a tape, if you turn on the radio, if you go to church and hear a sermon and God touches your heart with a truth, you are more accountable to be responsive in that area of your life than you were the day before. James 4:17 says,

Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.

(NKJV)

In Luke 12:47-48, we read of the servant who knew his lord's will and did not do it. He had a much greater level of accountability than the servant who knew not the will of God. The more we learn, the more accountable we become. The more responsibility we have, the more accountable we become. In Romans 2:17-23, Paul wrote,

Behold, you are called a Jew. You know all of the right things to do and yet you are a teacher and you are not doing the

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things you are telling other people to do. Your accountability is greater. (Author's paraphrase)

James 3:1 says don't be anxious to become an instructor of others because your level of accountability will be different. You will be gauged by a different measuring stick. The will of God has not changed. His standard is perfect obedience. His measuring stick of your love for Him is how you obey.

Principle 4- The more we learn and the more we are accountable to obey, we are then responsible to become more accountable. In other words you can't take a deep breath and say, "Well I have the solution to that problem! I just won't go to Sunday school or church any longer and learn more. I will just spend my time working on the principles I have already learned." You can't do that. The Scripture holds us accountable to become more accountable.

IN REVIEW: THE PRACTICALITY OF OBEDIENCE

The second area we dealt with in the last lesson was the practicality of obedience. It works in real life. It has to. We came up with four areas in which we meddled. Then if God was asking you to move in your life towards obedience in these areas, we asked you to pray and ask Him what He required of you? We learned then that He requires total, perfect obedience—immediate obedience.

One example we dealt with was lying. We discussed that if while you were meditating in the Word, you remembered that a lie is an abomination to the Lord, your thoughts were drawn to realize that the compromises in truth that you had been making were not pleasing God. You realized you needed to do something about it. The Scripture tells us that His standard of lying has not changed.

There are three levels of standards: the world's standard, the church's standard and God's standard. By the church, I mean the church at large. The world's standard says, "Do whatever you need to do, just don't get caught". The church's standard is that we have a new set of morals and a new set of principles as Christ is our example and God is our power, but we are human. God's standard says that enabled by the Spirit we will endeavor each day, as much as we can, to begin to do that which is according to the standards of the Scriptures. A lie is an abomination to the Lord.

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Another area we dealt with in the last lesson was speeding. Imagine you were meditating on the Scripture, “submit yourself to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake,” and God convicts you that 55 MPH is an ordinance of man; therefore, it glorifies the Lord to obey the speed limit. The Scripture goes on to say in Romans 13 that the police are not a terror to you if you are obeying the law. It is only when you are outside of the law that they bother you. Those little red lights don’t flash in your rear view mirror if you are not doing anything wrong.

This led us to the compromise issue. We discussed not speeding through a school zone at 75 MPH. We decided it would be better to cut it down to 70 MPH. We are going to tell the Lord to be patient with us because God is not finished with us yet, and, after all, we are doing a little bit better than we did yesterday. But, God’s standards haven’t changed.

Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for
the Lord’s sake, (I Peter 2:13a NKJV)

We then dealt with that touchy subject of being overweight. We discussed the fact that the body is the temple of God. We are to be temperate in all things. If God convicts you in this area, what do you do? You put it off. You say, “I’m fifty pounds overweight, so I am going to get down to forty.”

We also looked at the area of financial freedom. You have been convicted in this area from the Scripture, “Owe no one anything...”² “the borrower is slave to the lender.”³ So we decided that we are going to get out of that trap. We have 30 credit cards, so we are going to get rid of 15 of them. This is the way we try to meet the standards of God, but compromise doesn’t work.

What it boils down to is the title of our lesson today, “The Performance of Obedience”. How do we make it work? We will deal with four areas of obedience. There are four ways God judges whether or not we are faithful and obedient. We will discuss these four areas over the next few lessons.

THE PERFORMANCE OF OBEDIENCE

- 1- How *quickly* do you obey when you know the will of God?
- 2- How *completely* do you obey, when you know the will of God?

² Romans 13:8a

³ Proverbs 22:7b

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3- How *consistently* do you obey, when you know the will of God?

4- How *joyfully* do you obey, when you know the will of God,

Let's deal with the first one in this lesson. How quickly do you obey when you know God's will? We will deal with the issue, the importance, the illustration and the instructions of responding to God's commands immediately.

THE ISSUE OF OBEDIENCE

The principle to consider is that the absence of a stated time means now. For example, many of you are parents. At some time in your life you have been familiar with the age-old situation of calling your children to dinner. There are two ways to do this. The first is to come to your child and say, "Jenny, I want you to be in for dinner at six o'clock." Now you recognize, based on this statement, that there is a command and a time element. You will gauge obedience on whether or not your child shows up at six o'clock. However, there is also the more common situation where we bellow at the top of our lungs, "Jenny! Come for supper!" Does that mean to come at five, six or seven? When there is no time element connected with that instruction it means now. Whether or not Jenny is obedient to your command is going to be gauged on how long it takes her to come from where she is to dinner.

Don't laugh at the children, we do these same things with God. What is the first thing the children do when called? They play like they are deaf. They are playing a game and are not ready to eat because they know you have fixed spinach. They can hear the ice cream truck seven blocks away, but they just didn't hear you. They keep on doing what they are doing. They imagine maybe you are talking to someone else. Have you ever done that with God?

Then there is the slow motion process. Jenny gets up, stretches and takes a step, then sits down and turns on the television. She then gets up on the second call, takes another step and washes one hand. Have you ever seen a child slow-play it to dinner? The point is the immediacy of their response indicates whether or not they are obedient.

THE IMPORTANCE OF OBEDIENCE

We are the same way with God. It is true that growth is slow, but response is to be immediate. Most of God's commands

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and most of God's warnings come in that category. He wants immediate response. One reason is that when we don't respond immediately, we are saying to God that we want time to question whether or not He really means what He says and whether He really knows what He is asking us to do. This is what our children are doing; they are testing us. When we do this, we are testing God.

Remember that meditation quickens and sharpens the mind. It makes us more accessible to know the will of God and more responsive to obey the will of God. In counseling situations, the biggest problem is counseling those who have never learned obedience. They have never learned to respond immediately. They have never learned to respond properly without questioning. Those people have difficulty responding to counsel in all areas of life. But those who have learned by grace as a child or as a youth to respond immediately, properly and respectfully are open to wise counsel.

Is there a command in any area of your life that God has been dealing with you about that you plan to obey sometime? I'm not a fan of bumper stickers, but a new Christian bumper sticker ought to say, Obedience is *NOW*! As we go on with this lesson, I think you will see what I mean.

Have you ever asked yourself the question, "What if the timing of God's response was proportionate to ours?" I'm not saying this is true, but can you imagine what it would be like if it was? Jesus said, "Judge not that you be not judged." We are also told that we are blessed in proportion to our giving.

But what if God's response to us was relative to the immediacy of our response to Him? Have you ever imagined being in a situation where you were crying out to the Lord, "Help me! Give me grace!", and you were met with a busy signal? Can you imagine the Lord reaching down to say, "I want to think about it for a while"? We expect God to respond to us immediately when we cry out. That is what he has promised. Why? Because He loves us. He says, "If you love Me, you will respond to Me the same way I respond to you, immediately."

There are at least three areas of immediate response.

- 1- Responding to God's call.
- 2- Responding to God's instructions.
- 3- Responding in the face of temptation.

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Response 1- Responding immediately to God's call.

Turn to Matthew 4,

And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen.

Then He said to them, " Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."
(Matthew 4:18,19 NKJV)

Can you imagine yourself in that situation? Have you ever stopped to think about the response these two men gave and why Jesus called upon these two? Let's see why.

They immediately left their nets and followed Him.

(Matthew 4:20 NKJV)

These two men dropped their nets immediately and followed Jesus.

Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them,

(Matthew 4:21 NKJV)

It doesn't say that they thought about it. They had a committee meeting. They prayed about it. They planned on it. Eventually, several weeks later they met Jesus and followed Him. No, it says immediately. The word used here means without hesitation.

and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.

(Matthew 4:22 NKJV)

We have to ask ourselves this question, "Do we believe there is a relationship between the immediacy of our first response when Christ calls and our responsiveness to Him in later life?" I'm not sure, but I do know this, we have to learn to respond immediately. If we stop to look at either the salvation experience or a call of God to commitment in some area of our lives, how many of us postpone it and say, "Someday, sooner or later I'm going to do that." Have you ever thought of the wasted time in your life? Have you ever thought of the wasted stewardship of time just because you postponed the reality of what God intended for you to do? This little poem explains it.

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LATE IN LIFE

How often, late in life man has
Gazed backward through the years
And viewed the life he's wasted
Through dark and bitter tears.

How often man has viewed his soul
And every chance he had,
And thought, "If I'd but trusted Christ
When I was still a lad."

"All the years I've wasted,
I've lived them bound in sin.
And every time the Lord would knock
I failed to let Him in."

"And now as sunset's fleeting glow
Has rimmed the skies with strife,
I've come to trust in Jesus
And I've found eternal life."

"Such joy I've found, such peace I know
But oh, the souls unsaved
Because of all the years between
I lived as Satan's slave."

Young people, harken Jesus' call
While you're a youth instead
That you might reap the harvest
In the years that lie ahead.

We need to consider the wasted time in our lives while we wait to respond to God's call.

Postponing a call to a ministry.

Maybe you are someone whom God has called specifically to a certain area of ministry, and know it. It is not a matter of discerning the will of God; it is a matter of knowing the will of God and postponing it. Maybe you have been called to teach. Maybe you have been called to be involved in evangelism. Maybe God is calling you to get involved in a group Bible study. Maybe God is calling you to preach. Whatever it is, you know without any doubt that God has called you, but you are waiting now for some propitious moment or for something else to happen before you get around to responding to that call. Have you ever realized

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how much wasted time is in your life? In terms of stewardship, the fact is that the longer you wait, the more difficult it becomes to respond to the known will of God. Let's look at Isaiah,

And he touched my mouth with it [a live coal], and said:
"Behold, this has touched your lips;
Your iniquity is taken away,
And your sin purged."

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying:
"Whom shall I send,
And who will go for Us?"

Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." (Isaiah 6:7,8 NKJV)

This is a familiar passage to many, but we don't meditate on it because we have heard it too many times. It tells us that if there is some place God is trying to send us and we are postponing it, we are out of the will of God. We are out of the will of God because obedience requires immediate action.

Responding to God's call of obedience.

Acts 16:33 relates to this. Paul and Silas were in prison. They had a prayer meeting, and they began to sing. There was an earthquake, and the prison doors were opened. The jailer called for a light, and he came in trembling and found Paul and Silas. He fell down before them and then brought them out of the jail. He asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They replied, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and your house also." They spoke of the word of the Lord to all who were in the house. How long did he wait?

And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. (Acts 16:33 NKJV)

Now all of us recognize that baptism is not essential to your salvation, but it is a commandment to obey. If you know Christ as your personal Savior, and you know that the Scripture instructs that as a demonstration to the world that you should be baptized, don't put it off waiting for a better time. You need to consider what God wants through your obedience.

Imagine a soldier who joins the military and gets his first order to appear for KP duty. He thinks to himself, "I'm going to wait for an instruction I like better." Imagine a couple who gets married, and the first thing the wife asks the husband to do is to take the garbage out. He says, "I would really like to oblige

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you, but I really don't like garbage. I tell you what I will do. I will consider your next request." The point is that if you really love someone, and you tell them that you love them; but you refuse to do the first thing they ask you to do, how much do you really love them? *The first thing the Lord asks you to do when you receive Christ is simply to follow Him in baptism.* It is an ordinance to indicate something that has taken place in your heart. You belong to Christ either way. How in the world can you say you love Him and not do the first thing He asks you to do?

Maybe you need to consider those friendships and alliances that you plan to give up someday because you know that they are pulling you down. When would be the best time to deal with them? Yesterday? Think about your habits or the places you go. Remember this—the easiest time is yesterday and the hardest time is tomorrow. The best time to obey is today.

Response 2- Immediate response to instruction.

We will look at Deuteronomy 1. This is a familiar passage to many. Moses is talking to the children of Israel:

“And every one of you came near to me and said, ‘Let us send men before us, and let them search out the land for us, and bring back word to us of the way by which we should go up, and of the cities into which we shall come.’”

“The plan pleased me well; so I took twelve of your men, one man from each tribe.

And they departed and went up into the mountains, and came to the Valley of Eshcol, and spied it out.

They also took some of the fruit of the land in their hands and brought it down to us; and they brought back word to us, saying, ‘It is a good land which the Lord our God is giving us.’”

“Nevertheless you would not go up, but rebelled against the command of the Lord your God;

and you complained in your tents, and said, ‘Because the Lord hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us.

Where can we go up? Our brethren have discouraged our hearts, saying, “The people are greater and taller than we; the cities are great and fortified up to heaven; moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakim there.”’”

“Then I said to you, ‘Do not be terrified, or afraid of them.

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The Lord your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you, according to all He did for you in Egypt before your eyes,

and in the wilderness where you saw how the Lord your God carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place.’

Yet, for all that, you did not believe the Lord your God,

who went in the way before you to search out a place for you to pitch your tents, to show you the way you should go, in the fire by night and in the cloud by day.

“And the Lord heard the sound of your words, and was angry, and took an oath, saying,

‘Surely not one of these men of this evil generation shall see that good land of which I swore to give to your fathers,

except Caleb the son of Jephunneh; he shall see it, and to him and his children I am giving the land on which he walked, because he wholly followed the Lord.’

The Lord was also angry with me for your sakes, saying, “Even you shall not go in there.

Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall go in there. Encourage him, for he shall cause Israel to inherit it.

‘Moreover your little ones and your children, who you say will be victims, who today have no knowledge of good and evil, they shall go in there; to them I will give it, and they shall possess it.

But as for you, turn and take your journey into the wilderness by the Way of the Red Sea.’

“Then you answered and said to me, ‘We have sinned against the Lord; we will go up and fight, just as the Lord our God commanded us.’ And when everyone of you had girded on his weapons of war, you were ready to go up into the mountain.

“And the Lord said to me, ‘Tell them, “Do not go up nor fight, for I am not among you; lest you be defeated before your enemies.”’

(Deuteronomy 1:22-42 NKJV)

The Israelites agreed that they didn’t go up and fight immediately when God had asked, but they decided to do it now to show God how great they were and that they could be faithful after all.

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The time had passed. The moment of truth was over. The time for obedience was then. God told them, “Don’t go now, you will lose the battle.”

“And the Lord said to me, ‘ Tell them, “Do not go up nor fight, for I am not among you; lest you be defeated before your enemies.”’”

So I spoke to you; yet you would not listen, but rebelled against the command of the Lord, and presumptuously went up into the mountain.

And the Amorites who dwelt in that mountain came out against you and chased you as bees do, and drove you back from Seir to Hormah.

Then you returned and wept before the Lord, but the Lord would not listen to your voice nor give ear to you.

“So you remained in Kadesh many days, according to the days that you spent there.” (Deuteronomy 1:43-46 NKJV)

They lost. There is a time to obey the will of God. Particularly when the warning of God comes our way, we need to obey immediately. Imagine a child is playing in the street. There isn’t time to stop and deal with the principles, you simply warn them, and they need to learn to respond immediately. If a soldier is on the battlefield, he needs to learn that when the warning comes he needs to duck or move immediately. When there is a fire, we need to be so conditioned that when the warning is yelled, “Fire!” we need to move immediately. When God says, “Move!” we need to move.

Response 3- Responding in the face of temptation.

How do we respond in the face of temptation? This is the most important of all. I believe that this is the solution to the problem of besetting sins which all of us have. If you say you don’t have any besetting sins, then your problem is that you have the inability to admit your besetting sins. It is still a besetting sin. The time to resist the enemy is at the outset. The very first moment you sense God’s voice you need to obey. James 1 says:

Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.

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But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.

Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. (James 1:12-17 NKJV)

The time to resist the enemy is at the outset, when you first hear His voice. This is the key to dealing with all besetting sin. You may be moving toward the enemy camp, and you don't realize it. All of a sudden, a voice behind you says, "Stop! The enemy lurks there." You have two choices. You can turn around and go back, or you can keep walking. What happens when you keep walking into the enemy camp?

1- The voice behind you gets weaker, because you get further from your source of strength. Have you ever seen a mother calling her small child, and the further away the child got from the mother, the less he heard? She was still calling, but when he got far enough away, he couldn't hear, and it didn't bother him anymore. That is the same with us when we get too far from hearing God's voice.

2- The risk of defeat gets greater. The further you get from home base, the closer you get to the heart of enemy territory.

3- The way back is longer. The Scripture says specifically that if you resist the devil, he will flee from you. Sometimes we put our arm around his shoulder and say, "Hi, you devil. I'm not going to pay any attention to you buddy." We have a hard time admitting it, but this is the way most of us live. We are supposed to resist him, and, instead, we give him a hug and say, "Now go away."

Is this the way you treat a stray dog that you don't want in the neighborhood? Do you feed him and pat him on the head and then say, "Go away.?" No, you don't have anything to do with that stray dog. What does Scripture tell us to do when we first hear the voice of the Stranger? What was Eve's problem in the garden? She listened to the voice of the Stranger. The first time you hear the voice that you know is breathing enemy language, what do you do? You claim the Word of God, and you turn from it. You need to flee and resist the devil.

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The word, “flee,” means that you put on your track shoes and run. You don’t stop and have a party first. You run! The first time an idle thought comes into your mind, what do you do? You cannot cultivate it for a while, and nor think about it too long. When you get knee deep in it, then it is harder deal with. The time to deal with it is the moment the thought hits you. Sin? Confess, “Sorry, Lord.” Then replace it with the Word. This is the point at which to deal with temptation—immediately. We need to have immediate obedience. The Scripture says that we should not tempt the Lord our God. We tempt Him by moving further and further into enemy territory. We then say, “Don’t leave me, Lord. Follow me. I’m going to need You in a minute.” Sure enough, we do.

Consider that idle glance that we ought not to take. If at that moment we’re able to confess it as sin and look the other way, then we have victory. If we continue to ponder and think upon it, we enter enemy territory. We have to make the choice of whether or not to do a certain thing. But, do you move into that area and then try to deal with it when you are surrounded, or do you back away and with the whole armor of God resist the enemy? The whole point is that the time to deal with the enemy, in terms of temptation, is at the outset.

Illustrations of Obedience.

There are many, but I am only going to have time for one or two. The process of God’s revelation does not minimize the need for immediate obedience. God’s program for us, in terms of His instructions, is not always the way we would imagine it. Let’s look at some of God’s children who were told to obey, and they did. Let’s see what they were told and how they obeyed.

We will look first at 1 Kings 17. Elijah is in this passage. In verse two it begins as the Word of the Lord came to Elijah. He said, “I’ve got a job for you to do. I want you to go east of here and hide yourself by a brook that is going to dry up. I want you to drink out of that brook, and I will send birds to feed you.” Now you and I would say, “Sure you are, Lord. I understand. You bet. But, I am going to take a lunch pail with food in it just in case.” So he went and did according to the will of the Lord. He dwelt by the brook that is before Jordan. The ravens brought him food and in the evening he drank of the brook. It came to pass after a while that the brook dried up, because it hadn’t rained. He

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didn't panic, and the Lord gave him a new set of instructions. They were just as different as the ones before. God's instructions are usually not what we would expect. That does not change our response one bit. We are to obey immediately.

Another illustration is in Genesis 6:22. These are God's instructions to Noah. He said, "Noah, I want you to build a boat. I know it hasn't rained in a long time. I want you to build it in your backyard, a long way from where water has ever been. Here are your instructions, and I want you to follow them completely." God's instructions are often very complex, but His purpose is very simple. Begin with what you know to do and obey immediately. Can you imagine the timing if Noah had waited two weeks to begin that boat? There wouldn't have been any problem. He would have just drowned. The timing of God is perfect, and it was predicated on Noah's obedience immediately.

Look at Abram in Genesis 12:1-4.

Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country,"...
(Genesis 12:1 NKJV)

Now can't you hear us say, "Lord, I've lived here for 13 years, and I love it here."

"And from your father's house,
To a land that I will show you."
(Genesis 12:1c NKJV)

That may make it a little easier, get away from the relatives.

"I will make you a great nation; I will bless you
And make your name great;
And you shall be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you,
And I will curse him who curses you;
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.
(Genesis 12:2-4 NKJV)

Abraham got up, packed his bags, took the troops and went on his way. He didn't know where he was going, but he immediately obeyed the voice of God.

Jonah is our other illustration as we look at Jonah chapters 1 and 2. Failure to obey immediately often leads to discipline. So it is easier and better to obey. Jonah's story is a perfect example of this.

Obedience to Instructions

The last part of this lesson is the instruction. To sum up, whether it is God's call, whether it is specific instructions or whether it is certain temptation, we need to obey immediately. The Scripture tells us,

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.
(I Corinthians 10:13 NKJV)

Now I have heard a lot of you argue about what that passage really means, but no one has come up with an adequate answer. I believe what it means is that God, in His infinite wisdom, has given us a way of escape. The way of escape is immediate obedience. This little jingle might explain it more clearly.

WHAT IS GOD'S WAY OF ESCAPE?

What is God's way of escape
For each and every man?
From the temptations we all face,
What is the Master's plan?

Is it to garner the strength of the flesh
Or to take some sacred vow?
No, God's way of escape is His power to obey
And His way of escape is now.

The way to escape is now. He has given you the Word. Your way of escape is to obey it at the first impulse of temptation. So whether it is the call of instruction or an area of temptation, the key is that the known will of God should be obeyed yesterday if not before. We need to obey immediately. When we obey the known will of God immediately, that gray area that we do not have discernment in will follow. We will begin to know more of what He wants us to do if we obey what we know He wants us to do immediately. I will close with this poem (next page):

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SO OFT OUR EXCUSES

So oft do our excuses
So great and pious sound,
That we, impressed, are satisfied
That God by them is bound.

We squirm and turn and hesitate
And then respond in part,
But with a meager, poor excuse
That breaks the Master's heart.

But, oh, what breaks God's heart the most
And brings our Lord more sorrow
Are the words, "Of course I hear you, Lord,
And I'll obey...tomorrow."

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