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Obedience to the Finish

516-A
Series: Obedience

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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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With a couple of lessons behind us, I have an easy excuse to review slightly. So I want to very quickly bring us back to where we were and remind ourselves from Joshua 1:9-10 that we are dealing with the concept of spiritual maturity from the standpoint of what God expects of the Christian.

The first task is that the Word of God shall not depart from our mouth. We must engrave it indelibly upon our hearts so that it is always there. We came to the conclusion in a previous lesson that the only way to do that is to basically spend a lot of time in the Word; and, if possible, memorize what we can.

Memorization and time in the Word is not an end within itself. This book of the law is not to depart from our mouths for a reason. This reason is that we are not to tell the world how many verses we have memorized, but rather we are to meditate therein day and night. This is why we memorize that we might meditate therein day and night. To meditate means that we concentrate, evaluate, reiterate and appropriate.

Even the meditation is not an end within itself. *The goal is that we might observe to do according to all that is written therein.* Then, we will make our way prosperous, and then we will have good success.

The key to the whole subject is that the goal of God for the Christian is obedience, perfect obedience. We have been dealing with the concept of obedience. By definition, obedience is responding to knowledge by following instruction. We are dealing with it from the standpoint of five divisions.

- I- Perspective of obedience.
- II- Practicality of obedience.
- III- Performance of obedience.
- IV- Principles of obedience.
- V- Portraits of obedience.

OBEDIENCE - PERSPECTIVE 1

The first perspective of obedience has four basic concepts that we learn from the Word regarding how God looks at our obedience.

Concept 1- There has been no change in God's standards. A lie is still a lie to God. The world may have changed its standards of morality, but God's standards have never changed.

Concept 2- God's measuring stick for our love for Him is obedience.

He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is
he who loves Me. (John 14:21a NKJV)

This is His yardstick. It is not what we do for Him, not how active we are, not even how spiritual we think we are becoming; but how obedient we are to the known will of God.

Concept 3- We become increasingly accountable as we learn the will of God is to be obedient. Our level of accountability to obedience is much greater the more we saturate ourselves with the Word. We are then more accountable to obey it.

Concept 4- We have a continued responsibility to be obedient. We are not to stop, relax and say, "Now I'll just appropriate what I have and I'll go back to learning in a few years." The principles of Scripture require that we continue to take in the Word even though we become increasingly accountable in so doing. This is the motivation, the drive, and the principle that leads to spiritual maturity.

OBEDIENCE - PERSPECTIVE 2

The second perspective we looked at was the practicality of obedience. In this area, we did some meddling and took six basic areas that would affect most of us. We looked at how it would work in our lives.

The first area of the practicality of obedience was *lying*. God's measure of a lie does not change. If we have been convicted about the principle of lying, God is going to gauge our love for Him by how obedient we are to that principle. We

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become increasingly accountable every time we deal with it. The second area of the practicality of obedience was *speeding*. We must drive the speed limit and submit to every ordinance of man. We also learned of the practicality of obedience in areas of dieting, gossiping and financial freedom.

The last area of the practicality of obedience pertained to what we have learned in the Word. It included the concept of meditation itself. We study the Word, we talk about it, we share it as a group, and we meditate on it together. We agreed to go forth from here and be faithful and obedient to the Lord and begin to lay the Word on our hearts for meditation. The question is, how obedient have we become?

OBEDIENCE - PERSPECTIVE 3

The third perspective we talked about was performance and how it works in practice. We asked, “What does God expect of us when He says that He wants us to be obedient?” We divided this into four areas. He expects our obedience to be immediate. He expects our obedience to be complete. He expects our obedience to be consistent. He expects our obedience to be joyful.

We are in the middle of the second of these. Three lessons ago we dealt with immediate obedience. Two weeks ago we dealt with the completeness of obedience Part I. The first part is that God expects us to obey to the letter. We dealt with the fact that God is a God of great detail. We see this when we look at His commandments to Noah to build the ark. We see it when we see the instructions to build the Tabernacle. We see it when we look at the laws of nature itself. We see that God deals in infinite detail.

In Part II we dealt with the fruits of partial obedience. We took some of the people in Scripture and the questions they asked God and saw what they produced. Eve’s question was, “What harm could just one taste make?” Lot’s question was, “So what does it matter where we live?” Mrs. Lot’s question was, “What difference could just one glance make?” Moses’ question was, “So what? All I did was strike a rock.” The Israelite’s question was, “So what if we just hold back a little.”

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In Joshua 7 the question was, “So what? God will overlook the one and average it out.” What we realized in this process was that God is a god of detail, and He expects obedience in detail.

In this lesson, we will deal with the second area of meddling. God expects obedience to the end. Another one of God’s measuring sticks is, “Do you complete what you start or are you a quitter?” This is particularly appropriate for many of us who have made some commitments in our lives this past week.

As Paul compares the Christian walk to a race, we can divide ourselves into three groups: Sprinters, the the people who start quickly and wear out fast; relay runners, those who run for a while and then hand off to somebody else; and the marathon runners, who seem to move at a steady pace. These don’t seem to be going anywhere in particular; but when it is all over, they end up at the finish line.

Now it is true that, by personality, God has designed each of us differently. There are some of you here who are quicker starters than you are finishers. There are others who seem to be slow at getting started, but you just plod along until the job is done. What we need to realize is that the calling of God, no matter what your personality is, is to be careful what you start, but to finish what you start. I think that often God reverses our assignments and gives the sprinters long time jobs because He wants them to develop endurance. I think there are at least four areas that we tend to sprint and then quit in the Christian life.

The first is in the area of our relationships. This is particularly true of a disciple and discipler relationship. When the heat and the pressure gets strong, we tend to decide in either realm that maybe we have had enough. When the best is yet to come, the pressure becomes strong, and it seems difficult to continue. This is the time you are about to reap a great harvest. The same thing is true in relationships with people. The same thing is true in church relationships and in marriages.

The second area is the area of ministry. I think that it is

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so easy for us, in the process of accepting a call from God, to begin a given ministry, and then for two reasons, at least, to quit. The first reason for quitting is that we begin to steal glory from God. We begin to take credit for our successes, and we lose power. In Deuteronomy 9, God told the children of Israel that they would get into the land, and it would be beautiful. He warned them that they would begin to forget what went before and suddenly say, “By my might and by my power I have done great things.” God told them that when it happened, they needed to look out because they would then have no power left.

The second thing is that we get weary. We do the same thing year in and year out, week in and week out. We labor on. We press on. We see fruit, but we get weary. Yet, the Scripture specifically says, “Let us not grow weary while doing good,” Galatians 6:9a. We see God’s character spoken of in Isaiah 40:28, where it is said that He “neither faints nor is weary”.

God never gets weary.

The third area is our jobs. We take a job and begin to work vocationally. When either the newness wears off or the pressure builds up, we often decide that God has “called” us to a different job.

The fourth area is the disciplines of life. These are areas where Christians tend to sprint and split. We are not faithful over the long haul. We will make a commitment to time in the Word. After we have gone to a retreat or week-long seminar, we may decide that we are going to spend an hour in the Word each day for the rest of our lives. For a week we do it. The next week it drops down to 45 minutes. The next week it drops down to 30 minutes. Before long it was such a great commitment, and we think God must be flattered that we were faithful for a few weeks. We wait a year until the next seminar or opportunity to be emotionally or spiritually encouraged, and we will start over. We will have wasted 47 weeks of the last year not keeping the initial commitment.

Another area is memorizing the Word. We will make a

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commitment to memorize three verses a week. The first week we do that. The next week we only memorize two. The next week we only memorize one verse. The next week it is not important anymore, and we tell ourselves that we don't want to become legalistic and we wait a while. We go on for a while and God reaches out to touch our hearts again and all of that time is wasted in between. We need to be obedient in the personal disciplines of life.

Again, I think, for one of three reasons we start fast but don't finish.

a) First, we begin to take glory for our faithfulness. We tell our friends that we are memorizing verses. We are meeting with an accountability partner and doing many other spiritual things. We think we are improving, and our pride says, "Look at me." We steal the glory from God, and the power leaves. Then, all of a sudden, we no longer have the ability to be faithful.

b) The second reason is that we become bored. There is excitement at the outset. Then, we settle into the wilderness experience of the day-to-day routine of simply feeding the tree so that the roots can go down deep. We get bored with it because we expect some new, fresh experience everyday just like the children of Israel.

c) The third reason we quit in the disciplines of life is sin. Those besetting sins move back into our lives as the power begins to wane a little bit, and we give way to them. Through guilt and the absence of freedom in the spirit, we cease to be faithful to the very things that would give us victory over the sins that are haunting us. Satan is no dummy. He is no count, but he is no dummy.

This is a look at the problems we face. Let's do something better. Let's look at the person we worship. Remember meditation. Look at the characteristics of man and compare it with the character of God with an eye to change. We have looked at ourselves and realized that there are patterns in our lives. A pattern is an impression that we draw upon. If we analyze our own experiences, I think that we will see certain

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patterns develop in terms of starting, but not finishing.

Let's look at the character of God because that is what counts. We find that God's character is such that He completes whatever He starts. As we become more and more Christ-like, more and more spiritually mature, we will become finishers in the spiritual realm in particular.

As we look at God and His creation, His plan of salvation, the completed work of redemption, His restoration and His intercession; we will find that He, in eternity past, designed, planned, prepared and finished the work He started. He will not stop short of total completion.

Genesis 2:1-3 basically tells us that God sat down in eternity past and planned the creation one day at a time. Have you ever wondered why God planned the creation one day at a time? All He had to do was breathe and it could have been done. There are not limits to God's capabilities. He was trying to teach us spiritual truth. He set aside in six distinct segments the job He had to do. He knew at the end of the sixth day it would be completed, and He could rest. He even planned the time to rest. The first day He did what He needed to do, and then He stopped. The second day He did what He needed to do, and then He stopped. The third day, the fourth day, the fifth day and the sixth day He did what He needed to do then He stopped. We read in Genesis 2 that at the end of the sixth day He finished the work He started. He took the seventh day to rest.

Have you ever thought what it would be like if God had stopped one day short? Yogi Berra would be in charge of the earth. We need to stop and realize the whole character of God. He plans, He prepares, He paces Himself and then He finishes. Most of us, if we had been in God's shoes, would have tried to do it all, the first day or most of us would have put the whole thing off until Friday. We would have taken a nap on Monday, watched television on Tuesday, drawn up the list of things to do on Wednesday and thought it through on Thursday. On Friday morning, we would have woken up and decided to whip it all out in one day. God set us an example to plan and pace ourselves then finish what is started.

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What if Jesus had stopped one breath short of Calvary? Turn to John 17. Jesus is speaking to the Father,

“Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You,

as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him.

And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.”

(John 17:1b-4 NKJV)

Jesus’ perspective was that He had finished the work and knew that the glory would come after the work was finished. We want the glory at the start. The glory comes when the work is finished.

Let’s now turn to John 19:30 where we will find Jesus’ completed words as He hung on the cross.

So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “It is finished!”

(John 19:30a NKJV)

When His work was done, His need was done. God called Him home. Finished. What if He had stopped one day short of Calvary? Couldn’t He have looked at the Father and said, “Father, I have performed many miracles. I have been available to You to teach these 12 hardheaded men. I have had many disappointments and heartbreaks. It is all over now. Father, there is no reason now that *we* have to go through this last day. Why don’t we call it off?”

If Jesus had done this, you and I would still be lost for all eternity. He finished the work the Father gave Him to do. Let’s turn to John 4:34. Here we see His perspective of what God expected of Him. His disciples had prayed and they said, “Master, eat something.” Jesus replied, “I have something to eat you don’t know anything about.” Therefore the disciples said, “Hey, someone brought Him some lunch.”

And Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of He who sent Me and to finish His work.” (John 4:34 NKJV)

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Jesus had two goals. He wanted to be doing the will of God continuously. Secondly, He wanted to finish the work God had called Him to do. What is the work God called Jesus to do? People. That was Jesus' work. People. That is your work. That is my work. People. Jesus said, "I have come to do the will of God and to finish what He gave Me to do."

In John 5:36 Jesus said,

But I have a greater witness than John's; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish—the very works that I do—bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me. (NKJV)

This is what God expected of Him. God expected Him to finish what He had started.

Hebrews 12 is a familiar passage to many of you.

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, (Hebrews 12:1,2a NKJV)

The author is one who designs and creates. The finisher is one who brings to completion. Jesus is both. He completed what He set out to do.

...He who has begun a good work in you will complete it... (Philippians 1:6 NKJV)

The work will be completed in us. God doesn't plan to write any unfinished symphonies in the lives of His children.

Paul says in Acts,

But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

(Acts 20:24 NKJV)

Paul says that two things are important. The first is that he is to finish his ministry. Second, that he is to finish his life with joy. Some of you need to stop and take stock of where

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you are going. Some of you, maybe in days past or weeks past or years past, have received a call from God. Maybe you had a general impression that you knew God had a purpose and plan for your life in the years yet to come. What I want to ask you to do is to ask the Spirit of God to begin to solidify your life goals. As He does this, you must be willing to lay yourself on the altar and tell yourself, before God, to be faithful to the completion of that task. Whenever He is finished, you are finished. Allow Him to complete in you what He wants to do in the process of growth, and complete in you the ministry He has called you to do.

In II Timothy Paul says,

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering,
and the time of my departure is at hand.

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I
have kept the faith.

Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness,
which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on
that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have
loved His appearing. (II Timothy 4:6-8 NKJV)

In other words, he hasn't been passive. He has fought the good fight. He hasn't been sidetracked from his goal. He has finished the course, and He has not been overcome by spiritual choices. He has kept the faith.

We can look in the Scripture and find illustration after illustration of those who have been given long-range tasks to do. In I Kings 6 and 7, you will see Solomon's challenge both to build the temple and build his own house. It took him years. It took seven years for him to build his own house. It was a long project. The Word of God records every time the words, "He finished. He finished." God takes great joy in recording when a job is completed. Some of us take great joy in stopping a job before it is completed. What I ask you to do is to examine your life in this area. Is your obedience complete in the area of finishing what you have started? You know what I am talking about. I am talking about goals and tasks. In a moment I will be talking about character and attitudes.

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The question is asked then, “How do we know when God is through, and when it is time to press on to something new?” Obviously, it is not His will that we do the same thing always for the rest of our lives. What if God is calling us to change jobs? What if God is calling us to change relationships? What if God is calling us to change churches? What if God is calling us to change ministries? What if God is calling us to change geographical locations? I would like to go over a few principles, because it is true that the obedience in which we complete what we start, does not always mean that we never make a change. Unless we obey the principles involved, we may make some changes that we will regret for the rest of our lives.

Principle 1- Usually, God leads to as well as from. Very often I will get a phone call from someone telling me that they are going to quit their job because the Lord told them to. I usually say, “Great! What job has He given you?” More often than not they will reply, “Well, I don’t have a job to replace it, but I think God wants me to quit this one.” I doubt it. God may be calling you away from that job, but He may not be through with the call until you see what He is calling you to. Oftentimes the enemy will call you to quit. The world flees when the pressure is on, but the Christian stays. This is the big difference. When the pressure gets on, the world’s whole philosophy is, Run! God’s whole philosophy is, Stand! Remember? See, Set, Stand.

Principle 2- Learn to confirm His will. You may be under pressure. You may be weary. You may be out of fellowship. Learn to confirm His will. Don’t move by impulse. I have heard so many people say, “I got my feelings hurt. I’m not going to go to this church anymore.” Or I will hear, “I became burdened about this ministry and last week I didn’t have any decision so I am going to go into something new.” Don’t move on impulse. Confirm His will by the three basic principles we use to confirm the will of God.

The first basic confirmation of His will is the Word of God. There are three aspects to the Word of God; the commands, the warnings and the principles. The commands are what God tells us to do. The warnings are what He tells us not to do. The principles are the undergirding concepts by which we can

make our own decisions in harmony with the plan of God. The principles of the Word are the first thing we ought to go to if we want to find out about a major decision. You don't quit your job unless you have some insight on how you are going to make a living. The Scripture says if you don't support your family, you are worse than an infidel. He that doesn't work doesn't eat. You understand the principles of the Word, and you don't violate them.

Along with the principles of the Word, you look for the leading of the Word more carefully. This is when you are studying a particular passage in the Word and from that passage you decide that God is saying to you, "This is what I want you to do." But you have to be very careful that you keep those leadings of the Word in harmony with the principles of the Word, because God never contradicts Himself. If you come across a passage such as, "Judas went out and hanged himself," you don't go out and hang yourself because of other principles in the Word that you know you would be violating.

There are other areas of your life where you might read a passage that talks to you about moving on. You file it in your mind then take it to God and wait. You don't violate other principles, of obedience such as financial freedom, just to do something that you are impressed to do. You take the leading of the Word and compare it with the principles of the Word.

The second confirmation of His will is to look for circumstances to confirm your decision. Circumstances should never *make* your decision, because Satan is such a great controller of circumstances. Circumstances should *confirm* your decision. If you have three doors open in front of you, stand still, then gradually go up to each and knock one at a time. Don't be a split personality and try to go through all three at one time. It may be that those are tests, as you recall in our study of Moses. God may be opening a door to test you to see if you will be faithful and wait.

The third confirmation of His will is the peace of God that passes all understanding. It will help confirm your decision. The Spirit of God should be used to stabilize and direct. Once again, this is not to be the deciding factor. So the Word, the

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circumstances and the peace of God should all harmonize and show you that this is the will of God for you.

Principle 3- Learn to wait and confirm His timing. This is the most important principle of all. Once you know the will of God, what He wants you to do should be your train of thought. I have a Word from God. I understand the principles. The door is beginning to open, and I understand the peace of God. I feel confident that this is the will of God for me. This is what God is all about. I believe this is one of the keys to Christian decision-making. What God is allowed to do in your life between the time you have discerned His will and discerned His timing is the most important time of your life. He will work on your patience. He will work on your sensitivity. He will work on His power through you. He will teach you truth. He will see that you don't make any mistakes.

You may say, "I know God is calling me to the mission field." Good. Take it back before Him and wait until you know which mission field, when He wants you to go, and wait until He provides the provisions you will need until you know without a doubt that every piece has been put in place. This is the will of God. His will is not that you go to the mission field in the flesh, but that you go to the mission field energized by the Spirit in total harmony with the will of God. Once again, let the Word, circumstances and the peace of God confirm the timing of God.

Principle 4- Learn to consider other people. I have been burned by so many Christians who are "Following the leading of the Lord" who are, in essence, insensitive, self-centered and inconsiderate. I don't believe they are following the leading of the Lord.

I believe that when you are in the will of God, you will not be running roughshod over the people around you. You may say, "God is calling me to quit my job. So what if the boss can't find anybody else. That is his tough luck." I don't believe this is the will of God. Love suffers long and is kind. I believe that the will of God for you and for me is to be sensitive to the people around us and not to run over them like a German tank.

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I believe that when you are making a decision, one way you can help discern the will of God and particularly the timing of God is to ask yourself how you can accomplish His purpose without hurting other people. Is there harmony between myself and the people I am leaving? You need to ask this question if you are leaving a church, if you are leaving a community, if you are leaving a job, if you are leaving a business. You may say God is calling you, and you want to be obedient. If the timing is right, there will be maximum peace with your relationships with other people. There will be unity in the body. You need to take the time to make peace before you press on.

Principle 5- Consider the reputation of God, not only the people affected by your decision but also the people looking on around you from the world are looking to you to see Jesus and say, “How considerate, how sensitive, how balanced is the Christian.” If you begin to make decisions that are impulsive and irrational and then tell people that this is the will of God, they will look at God and think that He is irrational and impulsive.

God’s ways are sometimes slow and awkward. I think our ways ought to be slow and to the world sometimes awkward. His general procedures are to remain and abide until He gradually reveals, restores and/or removes. Look at Jesus. Look at Paul. Look at Job. Look at Moses. The general principle is that God told them to stay in whatever state they were in when He called them. God, at times, speaks saying, “If you are a slave, so what. If you get a chance to be free, great. If not, relax and remain. I will come to you and work where you are. Gradually I will move you into the realm in which I want you to be.” So often we want to run and flee from the situation and do it in the name of the will of God. The world will run, but our job is to stand still.

CONTINUED OBEDIENCE - PERSPECTIVE 4

The last area we will cover is continued obedience. What we just dealt with, completion of obedience, had to do with tasks and assignments. Consistency in obedience has to do with character and attitude. Most of us seem to have the concept, “Today I was obedient to the will of God, and therefore I just

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received my temporary license to disobey.” We think that God is so excited if we are faithful for a day, and He will be satisfied for whatever we do for the week. God expects consistency. Once again, look to the character of God. This is how we learn what God expects of us. Hebrews 13:8 says that “Jesus Christ” is the same yesterday, today and forever. He does not change. Malachi 3:6 says, “I am the Lord, I change not.” His Word is unchanging. You can read of this in I Kings 8:56.

In this lesson, some of you have learned of new areas or old areas in your life in which you need to become consistent and faithful. What I want to encourage you to do now is to realize that the process of becoming faithful is not an emotional experience. It is not even a spiritual experience that comes from a seminar. That is an awakening experience, but the process of spiritual growth is gradual. It takes time, faithfulness and obedience. It is a tree that must be watered. It must go through the storms. It must have the wind blow, and eventually it will bear fruit.

The problem that you and I must realize is that these problems in our lives, these ups and downs, these roller coaster rides that we take must begin to level out. It is not how high we go; it is how consistently we travel. God wants us to be faithfully consistent with our walk with Him. He wants us to recognize that circumstances change and emotions change, but the principles of God are consistent. Most of us are roller coaster Christians.

ROLLER COASTER CHRISTIANS

Roller coaster Christians
That’s what we seem to be.
Up one day and down the next
That’s what others see.

“Praise the Lord! How great He is!”
We share with those around,
And later when they see us
Our chins are on the ground.

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Circumstantial Christians
That's really what we are.
If everything is going well
Then Christ is up to par.

But when the going is difficult
And problems rise in view,
We mumble, moan and mutter
And Jesus can't shine through.

Christian, Christian, listen
God has a different plan.
He has a life victorious,
He has a constant man.

He has a man whose very fiber
Is woven by the Word.
A man who lives above it all
While walking in the Lord.

Mountain climbing Christians
That's what we are called to be;
God-energized and God-controlled
For all the world to see.

The time is now; the key is the Word,
And victory is the goal,
Scripture saturated men
With Christ in full control.

That's what God wants. He wants the roller coaster to even itself out. He wants our lives to begin to be consistent.

The last aspect of consistency has to do with our response to besetting sins. You know what besetting sins are. These are the sins that attack us, and we just be sitting there minding our own business. They come again and again and again. I would like to remind you that these are not things that are new and different. Everybody has them. Everybody who is honest has them. These are not things that you may have total victory over until God calls you home, but the victory should ever increase day by day.

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The reason we have a struggle with besetting sins is that Satan is a wise warrior. If you were a wise warrior, where would you attack? Would you attack at a stronghold? We learned a few weeks ago that God condemned a nation because they attacked the Israelites from the rear, the point where their weakness was. The elderly, the women, the children and the wounded were there. That is the way Satan operates. He will always attack us at our weakest point. If there is an area which you know as a weakness in your life, don't be deceived by the enemy himself and think that he will change and not attack you there. He may lessen his attack some so that you will put your guard down, but let him that standeth take heed lest he fall. He will come back and haunt you at the point where he has always haunted you.

There is strength in besetting sins. I hope that won't be misunderstood. Besetting sins are often those things that God uses to humble us. When we think that we are really becoming spiritually mature, the enemy sometimes attacks at our weakest point. We begin to crumble and then God taps us on the shoulder and says, "You see, you are nothing special. The only difference between you and failure is grace. Now sit down and pay attention."

You and I need to recognize how to deal with these besetting sins. In some cases there is anger. In some cases there is jealousy. In some cases there is lust. In some cases there is greed. In some cases there is self-pity. In some cases there is self-abasement. The whole point is that if we look at God, His whole character is based on the fact that His character is unchanging; it is consistent. You and I need to learn to deal with life from a pattern of consistency and accept the besetting sins in our lives as a continual battlefield and put on the armor of God in that area and maintain the battle at any cost.

Don't try to believe that some deep emotional experience has cleansed you for all eternity from that problem. It may have given you temporary victory, but the enemy will simply wait until the battle has subsided, and your guard is down, and your armor is off to come back and attack you with all

Obedience to the Finish

of the fervor he has. The Scripture tells us that Satan is like a roaring lion, prowling about looking for a person to devour. That is his goal, to devour. He is not out to play tennis. I think that we need to recognize that God's goal for us is to be obedient Christians to the end. He wants us to finish what we start. He wants us to learn to become consistent in the key areas of our lives. Consistency is maintaining a standard of awareness of our weaknesses and putting on the armor of God to face Satan head on in those areas.

The character of God is that He is "the finisher of our faith". *He finishes what He starts.* The character of God is that *He is consistent.* He is "the same yesterday, today, and forever". That is what He expects of us if we are to develop into mature, obedient Christians.

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