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Obedience: Key to Revival

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Revival and evangelism, although closely linked, are not to be confounded. Revival is an experience in the Church; evangelism is an expression of the Church.

There is an outer mission, and there is an inner mission. The outer mission of the Church is that of carrying the witness of our Lord Jesus Christ to the unconverted world. The inner mission of the Church is its concern with its own life and fellowship. It is the membership of the Church facing up to the complacencies that have rotted down its discipline and robbed it of its power.

Who was it who first said, "Revival is a new beginning in obedience among the Christians themselves"? In any case, it is pertinent and probing word. What shiningly characterized these revived and Spirit-filled believers of the early Church was their unflinching obedience to all the known will of their Lord.

I. The Pattern of Obedience

Peter and John had been warned by the authorities that they must not "teach" in the Name of Jesus (Acts 5:28). The warning had gone for nothing. The apostles had "filled Jerusalem" with their "doctrine". When an explanation was demanded, it came in these words: "Obey God rather than men" (v. 29). For the Christian, however, obedience to God takes an exceedingly specific form: it is loyalty to the revelation He has made of Himself in the Person of His Son, Jesus Christ—a fact that Peter makes abundantly clear in verses 30 and 31, "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour."

"A Prince and a Saviour!" A Saviour—to redeem us! A Prince—to rule over us! Thus it may be said that the Saviourhood and Lordship of Jesus Christ are the norm, the touchstone, of the disciple's obedience.

We can be revival Christians, keen and conquering, only as we are yielded, on all points, to the Lordship of Jesus. No amount of praying will serve as a substitute for such surrender. There must be probing as well as praying. The rebel spirit, however cunningly hidden in our hearts, must be tracked down and handed over in order that Christ Jesus may be "Lord of all."

II. The Price Of Obedience

Obedience can be costly. These men, Peter and John, were paying a price for their unflinching loyalty to the Master.

Obedience may most you love. It may mean that, instead of getting the affection and applause of men, we shall get their wrath or their ridicule. Was it not so with these gallant loyalists of the first century? Their testimony drew the fiery anger and jealousy of the "high priest"

and his Sadducaic associates who, according to verse 17, "were filled with indignation."

Obedience may cost you liberty. They "laid their hands upon the apostles, and put them in the common prison" (v. 18). True liberty, fortunately, is of the mind and of the spirit, not of the body. But let us never forget that today's crop of Christians, at least in the Western hemisphere, are inclined to be a soft lot. Yet we are the inheritors of a tradition soaked with blood. The awakens and pathfinders of the yester-years went through "dungeon, fire, and sword," dauntless in their courage, deathless in their love.

Obedience may cost you life. The enemies of Peter and John "took counsel to slay them" (v. 33). This is not wholly a phenomenon of the ancient past. The Church in Korea experienced strong revival in this century. Scores of its leaders and hundreds of its members have gone recently to violent death for their faith. Who shall say that God is not calling Britain and America to a resurgence of faith and return to Christian holiness in order to prepare them for the "fiery trial" that lies ahead?

Obedience may be costly, but it is always worth while — if for no other reason, because disobedience is more costly in the end.

III. The Power of Obedience

It is set before us, in clue at least, in the words of our text, "and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given." Power had been promised by our Lord before Pentecost, and released in these men at Pentecost: "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me" (Acts 1:8).

As regards believers, it is the power of compulsion. "We ought to obey God rather than men" (v. 29). What indomitable force it is! It's Luther before the Diet of Worms! It's Riley and Latimer in the flames of Oxford! It's John Wesley facing the mad mob! It's Bishop Berggrav defying Hitler and Quisling! Not outer coercion, which is the devil's way, but inner compulsion, which is the Holy Spirit's way!

As regards the world, it is the power of conviction. Mark the effect of the testimony upon the non-Christian and hostile assembly: "When they heard that, they were cut to the heart" (v. 33)). A revived and re-empowered Church we must have if we are to cope with the glazed indifference and the polished sophistication of our day. Such a Church will not win everyone to Christ; but it will insure that men shall either take a stand for him or be stabbed through with conviction concerning Him.

"There is an allotted time for us to sleep, but there is also an allotted time for us to work."