

TRUST AND OBEY

by Ronald Dunn

A car may have a tankful of gasoline, but unless the fuel is ignited it won't move an inch. I know many Christians whose tanks are full but they are still stalled between the Red Sea and the Jordan River. For years I was puzzled by members of my church who knew the Bible like scholars, could hear a sin drop a mile away, traveled hundreds of miles to attend Bible conferences, but whose lives lacked the plus of Christlikeness. In spite of all their knowledge and activity there was no sign of spiritual maturity; love, joy, peace, and the other characteristics of a spiritual life were conspicuously absent. They had plenty of fuel - Hi-test stuff at that - but no spark to ignite it.

The purpose and timing of God constitute the fuel of victory in the Christian life. And the spark that ignites it, releasing it as a practical and powerful force in the life, is OBEDIENCE. God's power flows in the stream of our obedience.

Obedience is our responsibility. Even though the ability to obey comes from God, we, and we alone, are accountable for obedience. When the time is right, God reveals to us His purpose, then says, "Now it's your move." And at that moment, everything hinges upon our obedience.

What motivates us to obey God - what is its basis? The record of the Jordan crossing is a testimony to the unquestioning

and unhesitating obedience of Joshua. Under such adverse and pessimistic circumstances, how was he able to obey so admirably? The answer is actually simple: he trusted God. Obedience is the evidence and expression of our faith in God. Obedience is faith turned inside out. Faith is the seed, and obedience is the flower that springs from it. Faith is the root; obedience is the fruit. There is a very interesting passage of Scripture in Hebrews three. The inspired author is recounting Israel's failure to enter into Canaan.

"And to whom did He swear that they should not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief." (Heb.3:18,19).

In verse 18 he says they couldn't enter because of disobedience; in verse 19 he says unbelief was the cause. Well, which was it - disobedience or unbelief? It was both. For obedience and faith are two sides of the same coin. You act on what you believe and you obey whom you trust. If you were to ask the Sunday morning worshipers if they believe the Bible from cover to cover, probably all would say they do. Yet, the truth is, you believe only as much of the Bible as you are obeying! What you don't obey, you don't believe.

Not long ago, a friend called on the phone and asked me, "Will you do me a favor?" "What is it?" I asked. "Hey, come one" he said. "Will you do me a favor?" "Tell me what it is first." "What's the matter? Don't you trust me?" I laughed and said, "Nope."

Get the point? I was joking with him, of course, but if

I really trusted him, I wouldn't be afraid to commit myself to him. If we are reluctant to give unquestioning obedience to God, it is because we really don't trust Him.

If obedience comes from trust, where does trust come from? And the answer is - knowledge. You won't obey someone you don't trust, and you can't trust someone you don't know. So here is the spiritual equation for obedience:
KNOWLEDGE OF GOD EQUALS FAITH IN GOD EQUALS OBEDIENCE TO GOD.

When Joshua unfolded God's plan to the people, a plan that called for bold and resolute obedience, he made several references to the character of the God who was commanding them. He was saying, "Don't be afraid to do what God tells you; you can trust Him."

HE IS THE LORD OF ALL THE EARTH. This title appears in verse eleven of chapter three: "Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth ...," and again in verse thirteen: "And it shall come about when the soles of the feet of the priests who carry the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth..." This phrase indicates the sovereign authority of God. He is the supreme ruler of the whole earth; therefore, it is His right to command. He has the right to command not only me but also nature, for He is the Lord of all the EARTH. He is the Lord of the Jordan as well as Lord of the Jews. Praise God, if He commands you to walk across Jordan, He will command the Jordan to get out of your way!

HE IS THE LIVING GOD." "And Joshua said, 'By this you shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will assuredly dispossess from before you the Canaanite...' (Joshua 3:10). Because He is a living God, He is aware of our circumstances. He is not an unfeeling, uncaring God of wood or stone, but a living God who in all our affliction is afflicted too.

Not only is He aware of our circumstances; He is active in them. The evidence that He is living, Joshua said, is that He will make our enemies flee from us. "Resist the devil and he will flee from you," James 4:7 declares. A beautiful picture of God's activity on our behalf appears in chapter five of Joshua. Right before the battle of Jericho, Joshua meets a man standing in his path with a sword in his hand. Joshua goes up to him and asks, "Are you on our side or theirs?" And the man answers, "Neither. I have come as captain of the host of the Lord." The man, who I believe was the Lord Jesus in a pre-incarnation appearance, was actually saying, "I haven't come to take sides - I have come to take over!"

"When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him" (Isaiah 59:19b KJV).

HE IS A COVENANT GOD. The ark is described as the "ark of the covenant" seven times in chapter three. Obviously this phrase held a special significance to the Israelites. A covenant is an agreement, a binding contract. The Lord of the

earth entered into a contract with Israel in which He committed Himself to them as their God to act in their behalf. The covenant was originally made with Abraham and sealed by blood. Since the covenant was a contract between two parties with mutual responsibilities, the law was given to spell out Israel's covenant responsibilities.

The two tablets of stone containing the law were carried in the ark, so when Israel followed the ark, they followed the visible reminder that God loved them and had committed Himself to them. When Jesus ate the last supper with His disciples, He lifted the cup and declared that His blood was the blood of the new covenant. By His death on the cross, Jesus has bound Himself to us and has made Himself available to our needs.

A few years ago, several families from our church went to Colorado in early Spring. Winter was hanging on and the dozen trout lakes near our cabin were still frozen. One of my friends, who had lived in that area, suggested I walk out on one of the frozen lakes, commenting that it might be my only chance to walk on water. Where I came from, the ice never froze that solidly and I wasn't too crazy about the idea. But they assured me all would be well; so I slowly ventured out, keeping close to the edge just in case I had to get back to safety in a hurry. It was a brief, nervous walk on the water.

Later as we drove past another of the lakes, I saw a fellow sitting on a wooden box right out in the middle. He was hunched over a hole in the ice, fishing! It was quite a

lesson for me. That man had enough faith in the ice to sit in the middle unafraid and fish. Why? He lived nearby and KNEW THE ICE! He knew it, he trusted it; therefore, he submitted himself to it.

Any Christian can live in victory; but in order to do so, every Christian must obey. An old hymn says it like this:

"Trust and obey, for there's no other way,

To be happy in Jesus

Than to trust and obey."