

A Stop by Quiet Waters

“Obedience & Self-Discipline Develop Character”

“Solomon showed his love for the LORD by walking according to the statutes of his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places. ...At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, ‘Ask for whatever you want me to give you.’ ‘...give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?’ ...The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. So God said to him, ‘I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be.’”

“King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter — ...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 god" ...As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God. ...So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done. ...The LORD became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. Although he had forbidden Solomon to follow other gods, Solomon did not keep the LORD's command.” ^{1 Kings 11:1-10 NIV}

How could a man who had the Lord appear to him two different times, blessing him mightily each time, turn from the Lord to different gods? How could a man who had been given the greatest gift of wisdom that any human being ever possessed become so utterly foolish in his conduct? How could a man who knew the word of the Lord so thoroughly become so disobedient to it? What happened to Solomon?

Solomon was humble and wise in asking God for wisdom, but possessing wisdom and applying it to one's own life are two different things. Wisdom does not produce the quality of character which will sustain us through the decades of our lives, only self-discipline and obedience do that.

Solomon's downfall can be traced back to two things. First he compromised his trust in the Lord by making an alliance with the king of Egypt. This was his first act of diplomacy after he had established the kingdom under himself. His goal seems to have been to secure his southern border by a marriage alliance with Pharaoh. In this way he wouldn't have to worry about whether he might one day be attacked by the Egyptian army, for his father-in-law, and the grandfather of some of his children, would be ruling the nation on his southern border.

Solomon subtly shifted his trust from the promises of God to keep him and the nation safe to his alliance with the head of a foreign power. In the light of the circumstances it seemed a small thing to Solomon that God had commanded his people to not enter into

marriage with foreign women. That command made great sense for the period of time in which Israel was birthed, but times had changed, the nation was part of a new and more complex world than that of Joshua and the judges of Israel, and besides, it was just one foreign woman and the marriage was for a good reason. In this case, for Solomon, the end justified the means.

Does this sound familiar? Do we really have to compromise our obedience to the promises and commands of God in order to succeed in the 21st century world? Do the great changes in our culture necessitate a change in how we interpret the wisdom of God?

“Now King Solomon loved many foreign women...” The second cause of Solomon’s downfall came from a flaw in his character which he never addressed, but instead increasingly gave in to. The Hebrew word used here for love means “to have affection for (sexually or otherwise)”. It can be used in both a good and bad sense. In Solomon’s case his sexual appetite was out of control, and because he had absolute power and authority he could do or have whatever or whoever he wanted. Self-discipline never seriously crossed his mind.

Someone once said, “A man’s gifts will take him further than his character will sustain him.” How true this was of Solomon. As an old man he ended up doing what in his youth was unthinkable. *“For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, ...Ashtoreth, ...Milcom, ...Chemosh, ...Molech, ...And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the LORD ...who had appeared to him twice and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods. ...”* (underlining mine)

Solomon came to the throne with this defect in his character in the same way you and I entered the ministry of the gospel with our character flaw (s). We begin with them but we don’t have to end with them destroying us. Solomon didn’t have to come to the end of his life with his character flaw in control and the anger of God on him. It happened because he did not apply the wisdom God had given him to his own life through self-discipline and obedience.

Hardly a week goes by that we don’t read or hear of another Christian leader who has fallen due to an unaddressed character flaw. We all have them, that’s not the issue. The issue is what are we doing about the defect that has the potential to eventually bring us to ruin. Are we denying its presence? Are we rationalizing it away as something of little or no consequence? Are we re-interpreting the word of God to make it acceptable? Are we hiding it from others for fear they will reject us or condemn us for it? What can we do with our flaws to keep them from eventually overpowering us and bringing us to spiritual ruin? We must beware of deceiving ourselves, for if we do not confront and overcome them, they will eventually overcome us.

There is a way to deal with them. First, accept the fact that God is totally aware of it and all it is doing in you, and that he is on your side in your struggle with it. He is full of grace and mercy towards you and yearns for you to have victory over it. Second, believe

what God has said about it in Scripture. Don't rationalize it, own it. Third, confess it to God as a sinful weakness from which you want deliverance. Call it what it is. There is greater power in prayer than we dare dream, though that power is often applied to our lives in ways different than we are expecting. Fourth, find a brother or sister (same gender) whom you can confide in who will stand with you in your struggle. Don't try to do battle with that thing alone. Jesus didn't even send one man alone to get a young donkey. This is a primary reason why we urge and encourage pastors to get into a John 17:23 Fellowship group.

Fifth, make the decision to be obedient to the word of God regarding this issue no matter how difficult such obedience may be. Obedience develops character, in fact this is the only way godly character is developed, there is no way around it. Jesus said, *"He who has my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves me..."* Obedience can be extremely difficult, a battle which will take every ounce of energy and strength you have, but when you have exhausted yours the Spirit of God will give you enough to keep you from falling. God guarantees us victory in the long run. *"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."* ^{1 Cor 10:13 NIV}

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