

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **SOME MORE OF THE WAYS IN WHICH WE MUST BECOME FAITHFUL**

*Watch over your heart with all diligence,  
For from it flow the springs of life.  
Proverbs 4:23 (NASB)*

*And he did evil, for he did not set his heart to seek the LORD.  
2 Chronicles 12:14 (RSV)*

*"Only take heed, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children—*

*Deuteronomy 4:9 (RSV)*

#### **Rid yourself of the love of money**

One of the main reasons why people act unfaithfully is because they are tempted by the desire for money. The love of money will cause you to do wrong in all sorts of ways:

*<sup>10</sup> For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.*

*1 Timothy 6:10 (NIV)*

A man who can rid himself of the love of money will be liberated from all that. He will be free to do whatever is right and cannot be bought or controlled by money. Whatever wages you get, be content with them. Never allow yourself to be induced to do wrong in order to get more money.

It is far better to do right, and lose money as a result, than to do wrong in order to keep it. Losing money has only temporary results, but the consequences of doing wrong, or being unfaithful, are eternal. Therefore resolve to change, so that you have no love of money at all:

*<sup>5</sup> Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have;*  
*Hebrews 13:5 (a) (NASB)*

Moreover, if you should happen to become rich because God blesses you with abundance, do not set your heart on it or grow to depend on it. We need to be open-hearted so that God can give us wealth, or take it away, without us getting agitated about it. If not, then we will always be open to being tempted to do wrong in order to preserve our wealth, even if we did not do anything wrong to acquire it in the first place. That is an easy trap for wealthy people to fall into. The fear of losing what they have can easily cause them to start to compromise and to sin. It also tends to choke the effect of God's Word in their lives:

*Put no trust in extortion;  
set no vain hopes on robbery;  
if riches increase,  
set not your heart on them.  
Psalm 62:10 (ESV)*

*<sup>18</sup>And others are the ones sown among thorns; they are those who hear the word, <sup>19</sup>but the cares of the world, and the delight in riches, and the desire for other things, enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.*

*Mark 4:18-19 (ESV)*

### **Rid yourself of selfish ambition**

On a similar theme, set out to rid yourself of all selfish or improper ambition. If you don't, then you will always be vulnerable to being tempted to do wrong in order to protect your current position or your promotion prospects. The demons assigned to you will see that selfish ambition in you and they will make full use of it to trip you up. So close off that opening. Then they can't make use of it any longer.

By contrast, godly ambition is fine. You should always aim to do your best, and it is perfectly alright to seek promotion. There is nothing wrong with any of that. However it becomes wrong where your ambition is elevated to the place where it takes priority over your duties to God and to other people, or where your ambitions for yourself in this life mean more to you than your ambitions for the next life.

If any of those things are true of you, then your ambition has become a god or an idol. You have no right to do wrong to others in order to protect, or further, your own career. It is much better for your career to be held back because you do right, than for you to advance it by doing wrong. That may sound obvious, but it's not what most people think, at least, not in my experience.

Most people regularly operate in the flesh, even within churches. In particular, most people would act wrongly, without even hesitating, whenever they see their career as being at stake. That is wrong, and you have to convince yourself of the truth of that, so that you are ready, when the temptation comes, to stand firm.

### **Also rid yourself of the craving to be approved of or highly esteemed**

The desire to be approved of, or to be popular, is another deeply ingrained craving in all of us. It will inevitably affect, or even control, our actions unless we make a determined effort to control and resist it. However, few people do that. Most of us live our lives in a state of fear, dreading disapproval, criticism or ridicule, and making whatever decisions are necessary to avoid these things.

But that will rarely, if ever, cause us to go in the right direction, or to do what God wants. When difficult situations arise you will usually go wrong if your aim is to be approved of by others. Instead, decide that the only approval that really counts is God's. Seek always to do what He wants, regardless of whether anybody else approves, or disapproves, of you for that. This is very hard to achieve. Few even attempt it.

However, if you are willing to do it, you will find it gets easier every time. The first few times where you risk disapproval will be hard, but as time goes by, you will begin to lose your fear of people. Then you will become free to do whatever God wants, without the fear of other people's disapproval influencing your decisions.

### **Tell the truth every time and be faithful with money**

Never give in to the temptation to lie, or to misuse money or property that has been entrusted to you. Resolve always to be a faithful steward and to tell the truth at all times.

*<sup>5</sup>A faithful witness does not lie,*

***But a false witness will utter lies.***  
***Proverbs 14:5 (NKJV)***

Make a decision also to be completely honest with other people's money when it is entrusted to you:

***<sup>15</sup> They did not require an accounting from those to whom they gave the money to pay the workers, because they acted with complete honesty.***

***2 Kings 12:15 (NIV)***

Aim to gain a reputation for being totally trustworthy with money, and for having complete integrity:

***<sup>13</sup> I put Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and a Levite named Pedaiah in charge of the storerooms and made Hanan son of Zakkur, the son of Mattaniah, their assistant, because they were considered trustworthy. They were made responsible for distributing the supplies to their fellow Levites.***

***Nehemiah 13:13 (NIV)***

**Never use or manipulate people. Always be direct and straightforward.**

Here is another vital principle. You have no right to use any other person. In all your dealings with others you must be open and transparent and pay for all services or goods that you need. If you are willing to reciprocate, then it's alright to seek favours and help from others. But it's only acceptable if it's *mutual*. You must always return the favour later, or be sincerely willing to do so if needed.

It is very wrong to see other people as "resources" to be made use of. There are times when people have rung me up and I know immediately that they are only calling me because they want something. It's not a real friendship. They are solely looking for favours, or the use of my time. But they don't want to pay for it. Neither do they want to return the favour by doing anything for me.

I would be ashamed to ring people in that way, but many are not. They see it as fair game if they can get something from it. Resolve that you will not use other people and that any friendships you have are solely about friendship, not about getting favours on the cheap, or making use of other people in a covert or non-reciprocal way. We must never manipulate others. We must always be straightforward and tell people our real aims and motives. Then they can decide for themselves whether to participate in something.

Never trick people into doing things that you want them to do. The polite word for that is *manipulation* or *control*. A blunter word for it is 'witchcraft'. That's what witchcraft really is. It's about trying to manipulate, dominate or control other people, so as to influence them or get them to do what you want, without them realising what you are doing.

So, if you are running a Tupperware business, or selling life insurance, then don't ever invite people to your home or to a function without openly telling them what your aims are. Say "*I've set up a financial services business. Would you like to come to a barbecue I'm having, after which I will give a 20 minute talk about pensions?*" That's OK to say, because it's open and honest.

The person is then made fully aware of your motives and is free to say no. However, it would be wrong if you just invited them to your barbecue without saying why and then took the opportunity to try to sell to them afterwards. Such manipulative behaviour is very widespread. Indeed, it is often taught in courses on how to sell to people, but a Christian must never stoop to such depths.

## **Always follow your conscience**

The Bible is full of principles that guide us in how to approach decisions and situations. Life is so varied that infinite permutations of circumstances can arise. We then have to decide which principles to apply, or which principle comes first on a particular occasion. At such times, we need to be guided by conscience. That is the gift God gives each of us to guide us.

It's like using a compass in a heavy storm, when we can't get directions from anything else. We can ask God and He will guide us through our conscience. We will just know that a certain course of action doesn't *feel* right, even if we can't explain why, and even though it seems there are many good points in favour of it. When that happens, always follow your conscience and never go against it.

## **Be very careful before you make any vow. God will hold you to your word.**

Be careful with your words. Don't make rash promises to God, or anybody else, without proper consideration and reflection. He will hold you to what you say. Therefore avoid making any promise or vow unless you have thought it through and fully intend to honour it. Even then, don't make vows at all, unless you are really sure God wants you to do so:

*<sup>4</sup>When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it; for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow! <sup>5</sup>It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. <sup>6</sup>Do not let your speech cause you to sin and do not say in the presence of the messenger of God that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands?*

*Ecclesiastes 5:4-6 (NASB)*

## **How to decide whether to get drawn in to a dispute which involves other people**

This is a vexed question, to which there can be no easy or quick answer. What to do in any given situation will depend on all the specific facts of the case and on a number of relevant principles, one or other of which could loom large. Let's consider first the general problem and then look at some of the different principles that the Bible sets out.

When a conflict arises at work, or in some other setting, such as amongst neighbours, friends or family, it may sometimes be right to get involved and to take sides or speak up. Other times God will want you to stay out of it. It depends on a host of factors. We have to weigh them all up, including, amongst other things, the following series of questions:

- 1) Is there right and wrong on both sides, or just on one side? If there is wrongdoing on both sides, I'd be inclined to stay out of it. If it is only on the one side, I'd be more willing to consider getting involved.
- 2) How serious is the dispute and how grave could the consequences be? If the dispute is minor, you may be best to keep out of it and only get involved if serious issues are at stake, such as someone's career or reputation or a court case.
- 3) What are your respective duties to each of the parties? Sometimes you owe no specific duties to either party. Other times you may do so, such as where you are an employee of one of the parties. The greater the duty, the more you ought to be willing to intervene.
- 4) Are each of the parties wise, simple, foolish or wicked? If both of them are wicked or foolish, there is little point joining in. Nothing will be achieved and harm will come to you for having tried to help. But if one or both are wise, or even simple, that may be different. (See Books Five and Six for more detail)

- 5) Has the person who needs your help been faithful to you previously and are they generally faithful to others? If not, there would be little point in getting involved, because they would not appreciate your help or reciprocate it. They would not deserve it either.
- 6) Is anybody's job, reputation, marriage or legal case at stake? If so, a willingness for you to take a risk may be required.
- 7) Are there frequent conflicts involving this person? Or is this a one-off? If frequent, there may be little point getting involved, as even if you did something on this occasion, another dispute would soon spring up to take its place.
- 8) Does the dispute properly involve you, or would you be meddling in a quarrel which is not your own, such that you should keep out of it? The Bible warns us not to do that:

*He who meddles in a quarrel not his own is like one who takes a passing dog by the ears.*

*Proverbs 26:17 (RSV)*

*Keeping away from strife is an honor for a man, But any fool will quarrel.*

*Proverbs 20:3 (NASB)*

- 9) Is the wronged/innocent party worthy of your support, given that any intervention may involve you putting yourself at risk of hostility? Be aware that people often resent a witness or intervener far more than they resent their original opponent.
- 10) Is the party who needs your help seeking to use or manipulate you, or any other person? If so, you ought to back off.

**There is a time to be diplomatic and to stay out of a conflict, but there is also a time to take risks and get involved**

It is usually wrong to get involved in another person's quarrel or dispute, The general rule is that we should stay out of it unless there is a good reason to get involved. But if there is a duty to help, or if our conscience tells us we should, then we must come forward, give evidence, or do whatever else is required of us, even if it is risky to us.

There may be factors which require you to speak up and defend someone, even if it jeopardizes your own position. If so, you need to brace yourself and do your duty. I can think of a particularly heated and protracted dispute which had been going on for some time. It involved parties, who were all well known to me.

Initially I stayed out of it, hoping it would resolve itself without me having to step in or take sides. I knew it would cause problems for me if I did get involved. However the dispute eventually became very nasty and unfair. False accusations were being made by the blameworthy party against the innocent party. Therefore I felt, in the end, that I needed to speak up openly.

The event which prompted it was when the person whom I considered to be at fault rang me up and spoke very unfairly and aggressively about the innocent party. I told them, straightforwardly, that I believed that they were actually the one in the wrong.

Later a meeting took place and again I spoke frankly. It did not resolve the dispute, but I felt that the innocent party needed me to speak out. They were reeling from a series of blows being landed on them and needed to be openly supported. They were being harmed, both emotionally and spiritually.

Therefore it was no longer possible for me to remain neutral. Too much was at stake for them and a deep injustice was being done.

So, that was a case where I got openly involved and I think it was right to do so, even though the wrongdoers ended up insulting and resenting me as a result of my having spoken up for the innocent party. But I can also remember a situation about 20 years ago where, very unwisely, I allowed myself to be manipulated into joining in with someone else's dispute at work.

It all ended badly for me and nothing useful was achieved. The person who had enlisted my help was just using me for his own selfish purposes, to advance himself at someone else's expense. I realised that later, but only when it was too late. I had allowed myself to be used by another man in his own private battle with a colleague. It turned out he was no more right than the other person was, and no profound issues of justice were involved.

I misjudged the situation badly and took sides, mainly because I simply preferred him to the other person. I therefore assumed he must be in the right. But I had never looked into it deeply, or weighed it up carefully. I had never prayed about it either, i.e. as to whether to get involved. I just went ahead without seeking God's guidance. That was asking for trouble.

I can recall another occasion, when I was a very young and inexperienced police constable. We received a new shift inspector who was a woman. That was rare in those days. The whole shift felt that she was not very good at her job, and that she had been given accelerated promotion solely due to being female. They were probably right. She was not liked by the shift and the older men in particular bristled at her abrasive style. She lacked people skills, had very little tact, and was not as effective as the other inspectors.

Things got very bad and the atmosphere on the shift declined. Morale was low and, in the end, some of the older constables became insubordinate to her, usually covertly, but sometimes openly. It all went over my head. I was too junior at the time to play any part in it. It got so bad in the end that the Superintendent came in to carry out an enquiry into what was going wrong on our shift.

He questioned us, one by one, in front of the Inspector. I was so naïve that I gave frank, honest answers and told the Superintendent that part of the problem was the Inspector's abrasive manner etc. I said it in front of her, as she was present in the room. It seemed to me that I had been asked a straightforward question and that I therefore needed to answer it truthfully.

However, it achieved no good and my transparency just did me harm. The rest of the shift, having savagely criticised the Inspector behind her back, were shrewd enough to keep quiet and even to be sycophantic, in that formal interview, while she was present.

Ironically, I was the only one to criticise the Inspector openly, even though I was the one who felt the least discontented and who had said the least up to that point. It was purely due to my naivety. I did not realise that that was an occasion when no good could come from my speaking up and that silence was the only wise policy.

### **Ask God to help you never to compromise and never to betray Him**

As with any difficult task, if you are going to succeed, you will need God's help. That is very much the case here. To be faithful to God will require prayer. You need to ask Him to help you never to compromise, even on so called 'small' issues, and never to betray Him.

If you don't pray, then you may have to manage it on your own, which is impossible. Don't even attempt that. Be wise enough to realise that you always need God's help, and especially so where difficult issues are involved and wisdom is needed.

**Respond quickly to God's promptings. Never harden your heart or stop listening to Him.**

God will speak to you through your conscience to guide you as to what to do in a given situation, especially if you ask Him to do so. When He speaks in this way, it will not be in a loud, clear, unmistakable voice. It will be with a quiet, inner voice which enables you to know, or usually just to feel, that a certain path is right or wrong.

When God speaks through our conscience He does not necessarily explain *why* a thing is wrong, or go into any detail. But He will enable you to know enough to do His will. If you obey that prompting, then more clarity will be given to you later. Then you will more fully grasp *why* God did, or didn't, want you to do the thing in question. Therefore, don't wait till you have that full understanding. Respond to what you do know. Obey your conscience immediately, as it currently stands.

Don't delay or argue with it, just because you don't yet have full understanding. Accept God's promptings quickly and willingly. If you do, then they will get clearer, louder and more frequent, which is exactly what is best for you. Never refuse to listen to, or to obey, your conscience. Never harden your heart towards God, or take liberties with His grace and patience.

**If you stop listening to God and stop obeying Him then eventually He may 'hand you over' and allow you to destroy yourself**

The Egyptian Pharaoh, with whom Moses dealt, chose to harden his heart repeatedly. He refused to do what he knew to be the will of God. We know this because there was a previous contest between Moses and Pharaoh's magicians, Jannes and Jambres. Each time that Moses produced a miracle these occult practitioners did the same, using demonic power. However, there came a point when they could no longer match Moses. When that point came, the magicians, Jannes and Jambres, told Pharaoh that what Moses had was from God:

*Then the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your rod and strike the dust of the earth, that it may become gnats throughout all the land of Egypt.'" <sup>17</sup> And they did so; Aaron stretched out his hand with his rod, and struck the dust of the earth, and there came gnats on man and beast; all the dust of the earth became gnats throughout all the land of Egypt. <sup>18</sup> The magicians tried by their secret arts to bring forth gnats, but they could not. So there were gnats on man and beast. <sup>19</sup> And the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them; as the LORD had said.*

*Exodus 8:16-19 (RSV)*

So, although he knew that Moses was representing God, Pharaoh still chose to 'harden his heart' and to refuse to obey God's instructions. If you read the whole account in Exodus you will see that Pharaoh does this repeatedly, at least seven times. After that the position altered. Instead of Pharaoh hardening his own heart, we see that God actually began to harden Pharaoh's heart for him:

*<sup>8</sup>And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Take handfuls of ashes from the kiln, and let Moses throw them toward heaven in the sight of Pharaoh. <sup>9</sup>And it shall become fine dust over all the land of Egypt, and become boils breaking out in sores on man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt." <sup>10</sup>So they took ashes from the kiln, and stood before Pharaoh, and Moses threw them toward heaven, and it became boils breaking out in sores on man and beast. <sup>11</sup> And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils were upon the magicians and upon all the Egyptians. <sup>12</sup> But the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not listen to them; as the LORD had spoken to Moses.*

*Exodus 9:8-12 (RSV)*

After this, we see that when God sent a plague of hail, Pharaoh again chose to harden his own heart. However, with the next plagues of locusts and the three days of total darkness, it was God who, again, hardened Pharaoh's heart for him. We are actually told this directly:

*Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh; for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may show these signs of mine among them,*

*Exodus 10:1 (RSV)*

The relevance of these passages to us is that there comes a point in our dealings with God where He will, eventually, stop speaking to our conscience and stop trying to get us to listen to Him. This will only come after we have repeatedly and deliberately ignored God's voice, in the form of His written Word, or our conscience, or even the advice of godly people. If so, then at some point, God will 'switch off the transmitter' and stop trying to speak to us. He will then leave us to keep going in the wrong direction that we have chosen, until it ends in disaster.

Therefore do not ever allow that stage to be reached. Who knows how many times, or for how long, God will be patient with you? Perhaps His patience will not run out for several weeks or months, or even years. Or, perhaps today is your final chance to listen to His voice or to obey your conscience before God begins to harden your heart for you, as He did with Pharaoh?

Never put God to the test. Never go anywhere near that 'cliff edge'. Obey your conscience today and every day. Obey God's Word today, without delay or argument, and without fudging or compromise. It is not just with Pharaoh that God acts in this way. He also did it with the people of Israel:

*<sup>11</sup>"But my people did not listen to my voice;  
Israel would have none of me.*

*<sup>12</sup>So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts,  
to follow their own counsels.*

*<sup>13</sup>O that my people would listen to me,  
that Israel would walk in my ways!*

*Psalm 81:11-13 (RSV)*

If God is willing to let the Jewish people go their own way and "give them over to their stubborn hearts" then what basis is there to assume that He is not willing to do the same with you? Therefore fear Him and do not be presumptuous.

**One of the main causes of unfaithfulness is lack of courage. Therefore ask God for the courage to overcome all your fears and to obey Him, even when you are afraid.**

I have no statistical data to back up my point, but I have observed from experience that fear is one of the main things which causes people to be unfaithful or to drop their standards. For example a person might know that some practice at work is wrong but they fear to say anything, or are afraid to refuse to take part. They worry that doing so may result in ridicule or unpopularity, or that they may even lose their job.

The list of things that people fear is endless. What frightens you may not frighten someone else and vice versa. But, whoever you are, there will be certain things which you particularly fear. The demons who are involved in your life are well aware of what those particular things are for you. Therefore, they calculate that all they have to do to get you to be unfaithful is to engineer it so that one or more of these things, or people, that you fear are brought into the situation.

They will take care to arrange that, so that you are put under pressure and made to feel afraid. They will then use the thing that you fear, whatever it may be, as a leverage point to unsettle you. They want to get you to lose your nerve, and then to be unfaithful, by doing something which you know to



be wrong. The answer, in every such situation, is that we need to have more courage. Lack of courage is perhaps the one most significant feature which causes Christians to let God down and to fail to do their duty.

Conversely, if we have courage, i.e. if we choose to be courageous, then we will be able to go the things that please God, because doing His will requires courage. Look at how God viewed King Jehoshaphat. God praises him in various ways, but especially for being courageous. Moreover, it doesn't just mean courageous in battle, but courageous "*in the ways of the LORD.*"

That means having the courage to do God's will, even when that provokes controversy and makes you unpopular. For example, King Jehoshaphat showed courage by getting rid of the 'high places' and the Asherim, i.e. the means by which occultic, idolatrous worship was conducted.

These things were popular with the people. Therefore most kings, even the better ones, left them in place, for fear of getting an adverse reaction from the people. But Jehoshaphat went through with it and tackled the idolatry head on, regardless of the criticism it provoked. He did so because He knew it was what God wanted and he put God's commands ahead of his own welfare:

*<sup>3</sup> The Lord was with Jehosh'aphat, because he walked in the earlier ways of his father; he did not seek the Ba'als, <sup>4</sup> but sought the God of his father and walked in his commandments, and not according to the ways of Israel. <sup>5</sup> Therefore the Lord established the kingdom in his hand; and all Judah brought tribute to Jehosh'aphat; and he had great riches and honor. <sup>6</sup> His heart was courageous in the ways of the Lord; and furthermore he took the high places and the Ashe'rim out of Judah.*

*2 Chronicles 17:3-6 (RSV)*

### **Lack of courage causes us to compromise in our preaching and to stay silent when we should speak up**

Lack of courage causes people to stay silent when they should speak up. It also causes many preachers to give a compromised, watered down message. They know that telling the whole truth about what the Bible says would cause controversy and tension. It could possibly even lead to them losing their position as a minister. The thought of losing his income, home and pension has caused many a preacher to tone down what the Bible says and to limit themselves to saying what people want to hear, rather than what God wants to be said.

Whoever you are, and whatever the circumstances you might face, the answer is the same. We all need to settle things beforehand, and to make a clear and firm decision, that we will always say and do what is right, regardless of the consequences. It is no good leaving it to the moment of crisis and hoping that at that point you will make the right choice. You won't. You will buckle under the immediate pressure of the situation and give in to your fear.

However, if you settle it all clearly beforehand then, when the moment of testing comes, you will already know very clearly what you must do. The fact that the decision has already been made makes it much easier to carry it out when the crisis comes. It means that you don't have to think quickly on the spot, or make instant decisions, because you have already done your thinking and made your decisions.

Someone might reply to that by saying that if the fear is too strong, and if your courage is too small, then there is nothing you can do about it, just as there is nothing you can do about your height or the colour of your eyes. Some might even say that the amount of courage you have is genetically determined and is just something you are born with. Therefore, they would argue that there is nothing you can do about it if you don't have enough courage.

According to that line of reasoning you can't be blamed if you fail for lack of courage, because it's not your fault. That is not how the Bible presents it. It makes clear that we are very much answerable for our lack of courage. We are also answerable for our failure, in the months or years leading up to that point of severe testing, to have prepared ourselves for it properly.

The point is that, at least in the West, it is rare for any person to begin their life as a Christian and then immediately be thrust into a situation of very severe testing and danger. It is not impossible, especially in certain countries where Christianity is forbidden. However, by and large, God arranges it so that the tests we have to face begin small and then get steadily larger over the years.

Therefore, a faithful person with the right heart-attitude will prepare themselves for larger and larger tests by passing each of the smaller tests which they face along the way. No school will enter a pupil for 'A' level exams before he has taken GCSE exams and a host of other, easier, exams in the years before those. Likewise, God expects you to develop the quality of faithfulness, and to grow your courage, by taking and passing a long series of smaller tests, from the moment you become a Christian.

If you set your heart to pass those earlier tests and sincerely pray that God will give you the courage to face them, then your courage will have grown to the required level when the time comes to face a more severe test. Moreover, the practice you have had will put you in the habit of immediately resolving to be faithful and deciding to be obedient before you ever face the danger.

That way, when danger does come, you will be ready to make the right decisions instantly, before you have had any time to dwell on the danger, or to be talked out of doing what is right. So, you will certainly be held accountable for the hundreds of small challenges and tests of your courage that you take along the way. Therefore, if you really want to be faithful, then you will resolve to learn courage from each of those experiences.

So any failure on your part to handle a severe test later on would really have been caused by your repeated failures to overcome your fear when facing smaller tests in the past. For those reasons, you cannot deny responsibility when your courage fails you in some major crisis. That's because you could have developed your courage to the necessary level, if you had really wanted to and had been determined to pass the earlier test.

A classic example of this is the teenage David, when he volunteered to fight Goliath. He was certainly brave on that day, but it was by no means his first battle. He had, on many occasions, fought smaller battles with bears and lions when he was caring for his father's sheep. It was on those many previous occasions that he learned how to control and overcome his fear.

That was also when he had learned how to use a sling shot. So he perfected that skill too, ready for when he needed it. David had practiced overcoming his fear and so the contest with Goliath was not quite as unfamiliar an experience as it might appear. He knew that he had killed lions and bears before and thus he was confident, with good reason, that he could kill Goliath in the same way.

If you don't resolve now to deal with whatever your current fear may be, and also to seek God's help to overcome it, then it will eventually grow to the point where it controls you and paralyzes you. Your fear will then be a snare to you. It will trip you up and trap you every time you have to face a test.

**It is not a sin to be afraid. The sin is in giving into your fear and letting it control you.**

There is nothing wrong with being afraid. Fear is not sin in itself. It is natural, and even necessary, at times. Indeed, without fear there cannot be any real bravery. A brave person is just someone who

has learned how to control their fear and to go ahead despite it, rather than someone who has no capacity to feel it.

A coward is someone who feels exactly the same fear, or even less, but has decided that he is not willing to face up to it. Indeed, for a coward, the fear may well be less, because he is well aware that he has no intention of facing any challenge or taking any risk, whether small or large.

Thus, the dangers he faces are largely academic and theoretical rather than real. However, for a brave person the fear is all the more real, precisely because he knows that he does not have the option of running away and that he will have to face up to it.

By contrast, a coward does not even try to overcome his fear and he does not seek God's help to defeat it. He has already made a clear decision of a very different kind. That is that he will not do or say anything, or make any decision, which would have the potential to cost him, hurt him or upset him. In the end he becomes programmed with a default-setting that guides him on every occasion away from risk, danger or cost and towards the preservation of himself, his property and his reputation.

I have seen this in operation many times and have noted how quickly certain people can be diverted from the right path, merely because they see a risk of danger ahead. As soon as they see it they immediately, and automatically, seek for compromise and a way of escape. They do so as a matter of habit because it has become such a settled policy to avoid personal danger or cost.

They do not even need to think it through when the crisis emerges. They have already pre-programmed themselves to make it their top priority to preserve themselves, and/or their possessions or popularity, rather than be faithful to what God asks of them. For example, I have seen this trait in managers and supervisors within a workplace. Most of them will instinctively choose to overlook wrongdoing, and to 'turn a blind eye', so as to avoid a challenge or a controversy.

They don't want to be put under any personal pressure. Above all, they will avoid any face to face confrontation. Thus, for example, such a manager may face a situation where a nasty, hardened, battle-axe of an employee is causing problems within the office or is bullying or exploiting weaker colleagues.

The duty of that manager is obvious. It is to confront the wrongdoer, stand up for the victim, commence an investigation and disciplinary proceedings and get the wrongdoer out. But they usually don't do so because they already know, without needing to think it over, that doing what is right would be difficult. They don't relish the prospect of tackling the bully or facing a backlash from the bully's supporters. So, they tell themselves that the wrongdoing isn't happening, or that it isn't their responsibility, or that nothing can be done about it.

Then they look the other way and keep on looking the other way. That manager or supervisor is a coward, not because they felt fear, but because they allowed that fear to rule them and to cause them to neglect their clear duty. They chose self-preservation, or even the preservation of their own comfort, peace and well-being, rather than the needs of their junior colleagues and their duty to the business.

Their cowardice manifests itself in their decisions and in the order of their list of priorities. A coward will put himself first every time. By contrast, for a brave person, it is duty that must come first, even though he feels all the same fears, and faces all the same pressures, as the rest of us. Dangerous or challenging situations will inevitably arise from time to time. In fact, God probably causes some of them to happen. At the very least, He makes use of them.

He sees them as tests of your courage and faithfulness and He will watch closely to see how you respond to danger and pressure. One example of this, on a very large scale, is the way that God

allowed King Hezekiah of Judah to face the terrible prospect of an invading army. We are told directly that God wanted to see what was in Hezekiah's heart. In other words, God wanted to see what Hezekiah was made of and how he would react in a major crisis, when a large army approached Judah and was likely to invade:

*Even in the matter of the envoys of the rulers of Babylon, who sent to him to inquire of the wonder that had happened in the land, God left him alone only to test him, that He might know all that was in his heart.*

*2 Chronicles 32:31 (NASB)*