

# Obstacles to Growth and Revival

## Oswald J Smith

There is only one obstacle that can block up the channel and choke God's power, and that is SIN. Sin is the great barrier. It alone can hinder the work of the Spirit and prevent a Revival. "If I regard iniquity in my heart," declared David, "the Lord will not hear me" (Ps 66:18). And in Isaiah 59:1-2, we have those a significant words: "Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that he will not hear." Sin, then, is the great barrier, and it must be put away. Nor is there any alternative. There can be no compromise. God will not work as long as there is iniquity covered up.

In Hosea 10:12 we read, "Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you." And in 2 Chronicles 7:14 the promise of blessing is vouchsafed, based, upon unalterable conditions: "If my people, which are called by my name," declares the Lord, "shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." Hence, nothing short of a broken heart over sin, full confession and restitution, will satisfy God. Hell is full of remorse, but only for the punishment incurred. There is no real contrition. The rich man uttered not a word of sorrow for his sin against God (Luke 16:29-30). But David, though guilty of both murder and adultery, saw his sin as against God alone (Psalm 51:4). Mere remorse is not true Godly sorrow unto repentance. Judas, though filled with remorse, never repented.

Now God alone is able to bestow a contrite and broken heart, a sorrow that will result in the confession and forsaking of sin. And nothing short of that will suffice. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." (Ps 51:17) "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." (Pr 28:13). "Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God" (Jer 3:13).

There are three kinds of confession that must be considered:-

- (1) Private Confession; for where sin has been committed against God alone it need be confessed to no other but God alone (1 John 1:9; Psalm 32:5).
- (2) Personal Confession; for where the sin has been committed against another it must be confessed not only to God but also to the one who has been wronged. Nor will there be any peace until the confession has been made and forgiveness sought (Matthew 5:23-24).
- (3) Public Confession; for where the sin has been committed against the church, that is to say, the entire congregation, a class, organization or company of people, the confession must be as public as the transgression.

As long as iniquity among the people of God is covered over and unconfessed, just so long will the Spirit of God be unable to bring about a Revival. Men must get right with each other in order to be right with God.

One night at the close of a searching message, a young man walked to the front, and turning to the congregation, made the startling confession that he had stolen and used money that did not belong

to him; after which he passed into the inquiry room to get right with God. He had been the treasurer of two important organizations and had squandered nearly all the funds entrusted to him.

It is a common experience to find souls kneeling at the altar and calling upon God with apparent great anguish of heart, who fail to receive anything. And it is just as common for groups of people to gather together for nights of prayer for a Revival and yet never have their prayers answered. What is the trouble? Let the Word of God answer: "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that he will not hear." (Isa 59:1-2) Hence, let us uncover our sin first of all; let us make straight the crooked ways, let us gather out the stone, and then we may ask in faith for showers of blessing.

Now let us take our sins one by one and deal with each transgression separately. And let us ask ourselves the following questions. It may be we are guilty and God will speak to us.

- (1) Have we *forgiven* everyone? Is there any malice, slander, spite, hatred or enmity in our hearts? Do we cherish grudges; and have we refused to be reconciled?
- (2) Do we get *angry*? Are there any uprisings within? Is it true that we still lose our temper? Does wrath hold us at times in its grip?
- (3) Is there any feeling of *jealousy*? When another is preferred before us, does it make us envious and uncomfortable? Do we get jealous of those who can pray, speak and do things better than we can?
- (4) Do we get *impatient* and *irritated*? Do little things vex and annoy? Or are we sweet, calm and unruffled under all circumstances?
- (5) Are we *offended* easily? When people fail to notice us and pass by without speaking, does it hurt? If others are made much of and we are neglected, how do we feel about it?
- (6) Is there any *pride* in our hearts? Are we puffed up? Do we think a great deal of our own position and attainments?
- (7) Have we been *dishonest*? Is our business open and above reproach? Do we give a yard for a yard and a pound for a pound?
- (8) Have we been *gossiping* about people? Do we slander the character of others? Are we tale-bearers and busybodies?
- (9) Do we *criticize* unlovingly, harshly, severely? Are we always finding fault and looking for the flaws in others?
- (10) Do we *rob* God? Have we stolen time that belongs to Him? Has our money been withheld?
- (11) Are we *worldly*? Do we love the glitter, the pomp, and the show of this life?
- (12) Have we *stolen*? Do we take little things that do not belong to us?
- (13) Do we harbour a spirit of *bitterness* towards others? Is there hatred in our hearts?
- (14) Are our lives filled with *lightness* and *frivolity*? Is our conduct unseemly? Would the world by our actions consider us on its side?
- (15) Have we wronged any one and failed to make *restitution*? Or, has the spirit of Zacchaeus possessed us? Have we restored the many little things that God has shown us?

(16) Are we *worried or anxious*? Do we fail to trust God for our temporal and spiritual needs? Are we continually crossing bridges before we come to them?

(17) Are we guilty of *lustful thoughts*? Do we allow our minds to harbour impure and unholy imaginations?

(18) Are we *true* in our statements, or do we exaggerate and thus convey false impressions? Have we lied?

(19) Are we guilty of the sin of *unbelief*? In spite of all He has done for us, do we still refuse to believe the promises of His Word?

(20) Have we committed the sin of *prayerlessness*? Are we intercessors? Do we pray? How much time are we spending on our knees? Have we crowded prayer out of our lives?

(21) Are we neglecting *God's Word*? How many chapters do we read each day? Are we Bible students? Do we draw our source of supply from the Scriptures?

(22) Have we failed to *confess* Christ openly? Are we ashamed of Jesus? Do we keep our mouths closed when we are surrounded by world people? Are we witnessing daily?

(23) Are we *burdened* for the salvation of souls? Have we a love for the lost? Is there any compassion in our hearts for those who are perishing?

These are the things, both negative and positive, that prevent the work of God in the midst of His people. Let us be honest and call them by their right name. "SIN" is the word that God uses. And the sooner we admit that we have sinned and are ready to confess and forsake it, the sooner may we expect God to hear us and work in mighty power. Why deceive ourselves? We cannot deceive God. Then let us remove the obstacle, the hindering thing before we take another step. "If we would judge ourselves we should not be judged." (1 Cor 11:31) "Judgement must begin at the house of God." (1 Pet 4:17)

This has been the history of revival work all down the centuries. Night after night sermons have been preached and no results obtained, until some elder or deacon bursts out in an agony of confession, and, going to the one whom he has wronged, craves forgiveness. Or some woman who is a prominent worker breaks down and in tears confesses publicly that she has been gossiping about some other sister or is not on speaking terms with the person across the aisle. Then when confession and restitution have been made, the fallow ground broken up, sin uncovered and acknowledged, then and not until then, the Spirit of God comes on an audience and a Revival sweeps over the community.

Generally there is but one sin, one hindering thing. It was Achan in the camp of Israel. Ad God will put His finger directly on the spot. Nor will He take it off until that one obstacle has been dealt with.

Oh then, let us plead first of all the prayer of David when he cried, "Search me, oh God, and see if there be any wicked way in me." (Ps 139:24) And no sooner will the obstacle of sin be taken out of the way than God will come in mighty revival power.

A city full of churches,  
Great preachers, lettered men,  
Grand music, choirs and organs;  
If these all fail, what then?  
Good workers, eager, earnest,

Who labour hour by hour:  
But where, oh where, my brother,  
Is God's almighty power?

Refinement; education!  
They want the very best.  
Their plans and schemes are perfect,  
They give themselves no rest;  
They get the best of talent,  
They try their uttermost,  
But what they need, my brother,  
Is God the Holy Ghost!

We may spend time and money  
And preach from wisdom's lore,  
But education only  
Will keep God's people poor.  
God wants not worldly wisdom,  
He seeks no smiles to win;  
But what is needed, brother,  
Is that we deal with sin!

It is the Holy Spirit,  
That quickeneth the soul.  
God will not take man-worship,  
Nor bow to man's control.  
No human innovation,  
No skill, or worldly art,  
Can give a true repentance,  
Or break the sinner's heart.

We may have human wisdom,  
Grand singing, great success;  
There may be fine equipment,  
But these things do not bless.  
God wants a pure clean vessel,  
Anointed lips and true,  
A man filled with the Spirit,  
To speak His message through.

Great God, revive us truly!  
And keep us every day;  
That men may all acknowledge,  
WE live just as we pray.  
The Lord's hand is not shortened,  
He still delights to bless,  
If we depart from evil  
And all our sins confess.

*Poem by Samuel Stevenson*