

CHAPTER VII

Broken Vows

"When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for He hath no pleasure in fools: pay that thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that shouldest vow and not pay."

Ecclesiastes 5, 4—5.

Just as it is not enough for a man to have a general belief in the Lord Jesus, but he must make a definite act of accepting Him; so it is not enough to admire a consecrated life. We must come to the point of solemn, definite, personal dedication. Seek some quiet place and let it be done deliberately. Do it thoughtfully, as when the Scottish Covenanters signed that historical document with their blood. Believe that your Lord is there to take what you give and to seal it with His Holy Spirit.

James Brainerd Taylor, who died at the age of 28, and who followed in the apostolic order, has left on record his holy, solemn vow of dedication:

"It was on the 23rd of April 1822, when I was on a visit to Haddam, in Connecticut. The time and place will never, no never be forgotten. For a long time my desire had been that the Lord would visit me and fill me with the Holy Ghost. My cry to Him was 'seal my soul forever Thine.' I felt that I needed something I did not possess. I lifted up my heart in prayer that the blessing might be sent. I felt that I desired it, not for my own benefit only, but for that of the Church and the world. At this very juncture I was delightfully conscious of giving up all to God. I was enabled in my heart to say,

'Here, Lord, take me; take my whole soul and seal me Thine — Thine now and Thine forever. If Thou wilt Thou canst make me clean!'

"Then there ensued such emotions as I never before experienced. All was calm and tranquil, and a heaven of love pervaded my soul; I had the witness of God's love to me, and of mine to Him. Shortly after, I was dissolved in tears of gratitude to our blessed Lord. The name of Jesus was precious to me. He came as King and took possession of my heart: and I was enabled to say, 'I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.' Let Him, as King of kings, and Lord of lords, reign in me, and reign without a rival forever."

We have seen what it means to make that initial surrender to God, but the Christian life is one of continual dedication unto the Lord. This life of surrender and dedication is made up of a chain of holy vows unto the Lord. While it is true, and very essential, that there should be one great crisis in the believer's life, when he yields all to the Lord, still we must never forget that dedication is not so much an act as an attitude. Our attitude of obedience is the eternal "yes" to that one great act of surrender. To live and walk well-pleasing to God, one must maintain this habitual attitude of obedience. The Holy Ghost is "given to them that obey Him." (Acts 5, 32).

The Lord loveth a cheerful giver. ((II Cor. 9, 7). The Psalmist cries out with holy joy, "I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all His people." As we go on in the Christian life from our one great act of surrender, we discover with overwhelming glory the joy of making vows unto the Lord. What is dedication or sanctification except the making of sacred vows unto the Lord? In the book of Leviticus, the one Hebrew root from which the words holy, holiness and sanctify are derived, occurs a hundred and thirty-one

times. *In the last chapter of this book, we have remarkable instructions concerning the extraordinary vows of a holy life.* In verses nine to thirteen we read these words:

"And if it be a beast, whereof men bring an offering unto the Lord, all that any man giveth of such unto the Lord shall be holy. He shall not alter it nor change it, a good for a bad, or a bad for a good: and if he shall at all change beast for beast, then it and the exchange thereof shall be holy. And if it be any unclean beast, of which they do not offer a sacrifice unto the Lord, then he shall present the beast before the priest: and the priest shall value it, whether it be good or bad: as thou valuest it, who art the priest, so shall it be. But if he will at all redeem it, then he shall add a fifth part hereof, unto thy estimation."

A clean beast, after it had been vowed, could neither be employed in common purpose nor exchanged for its equivalent; it must be sacrificed. If, through some discovered blemish, it was unfit for the altar, it might be sold and the money applied to the sacred service, but it could not be exchanged. At the moment of consecration, God wrote across that offering, "Holiness unto the Lord." If, through some defect, it was unfit for sacrifice, and another beast was substituted, God said both were holy, and He followed the defective ram back to the flock, while "holiness unto the Lord" was ever upon it.

The solemn lesson for us in these words is that with God dedication is always a reality, however much we play and trifle with this sacred subject. Oh, dear believer, God never trifles! One of the hindrances to revival today is the superficiality of our public acts of dedication in our conventions, campaigns and camp meetings. Thousands of consecration hymns are sung, thousands of consecration prayers are offered, thousands of consecration vows are made, only to be kept so loosely, or not at all! We desire to emphasize the truth that God always reckons as His own that which we have solemnly

invited Him to take, and the sin of misappropriation is so much the greater after we have devoted ourselves and our possessions to His service.

GOD WANTS THAT WHICH WE HAVE GIVEN HIM AND NOT SOMETHING ELSE. We know of young people who have offered themselves for full-time service unto the Lord, even for the foreign mission field, who later have exchanged that vow for one of working and giving part of their earnings to support missions. We know a young man who vowed to the Lord to sell his vehicle and give the money realised to a specific purpose. Later, he changed his mind, kept the vehicle, and paid his vow in another way. Little does that young man realise that that vehicle now belongs to the Lord.

GOD TAKES ALL THAT IS OFFERED TO HIM. How often, in a few hours it may be, our dedication is forgotten, and our money, for example, is spent without any reference to God. But has God forgotten? Oh no! He has written across every coin, "Holiness unto the Lord," though men and women indulge with impunity in the awful sin of misappropriation. Alas, for this playing at dedication! It is a travesty on our Christian life, and dishonoring to God. It is an insult to the Son, and a grief to the blessed Spirit. It makes hypocrites of the men and women who indulge in it. We forget that all our dealings with God are for eternity!

Let us stop trifling with God and let our Christian leaders enforce upon the minds of God's people the solemnity of vows made unto the Lord. If we appropriate to our own usage what should be for the service of God, we are guilty of embezzlement, and there is no stealing so mean or so bad as stealing from God. As F. B. Meyer has finely stated, "One of our commonest experiences is the handling of money. And nothing will sooner show whether our consecration be a reality or a sham, nor will anything serve more quickly to accentuate

and enforce the life of consecration, than to spend our money daily beneath the sway of those principles, which it is so easy to enunciate, and so difficult to practice."

Let it be clearly understood that a fixed proportion of a Christian's income should in any case be considered the Lord's due to be paid over as a matter of honesty, apart from free-will offerings or thank-offerings. How often a Christian, who makes no calculation, and never renders the tithe, (much less the added fifth of the ordinary Israelitish Jew) will put down a gift to God's work as a "thank-offering"!

This last chapter of Leviticus is God's loving provision of singular, extraordinary vows to the Lord. This chapter is only for "second mile" Christians; for those who go beyond the usual tithe. Love always gives of that which costs her. An alabaster box of ointment costs more than a few pence!

Hear what David says, "Neither will I offer burnt-offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing." (2 Sam. 24, 24.)

There are too many "Achans" in the Camp, hiding the silver and the gold which ought to be devoted wholly to the Lord. And the army of the Lord, which ought to be conquering the world for Christ, is held back from many victories, and kept lying in defeat, for the sheer lack of holy, consecrated and zealous stewardship on the part of those whom Christ has purchased with His own blood. Were Christians purged of selfishness and the sin of covetousness, the Church of God on earth would march across the world with conquering power!

BRING YE *ALL* THE TITHES INTO THE STOREHOUSE, AND PROVE ME NOW!

*Not your own, but His ye are,
Who hath paid a price untold,
For your life, exceeding far,
All earth's store of gems and gold;*

*With the precious blood of Christ,
Ransom treasure all unpriced,
Full redemption is procured,
Full salvation is assured.*

*Not your own, but His by right,
His peculiar treasure now;
Fair and precious in His sight,
Purchased jewels for His brow.
He will keep what thus He sought,
Safely guard the dearly bought,
Cherish that which He did choose,
Always love and never lose.*

*Not your own, to Him ye owe
All your life and all your love;
Live, that ye His praise may show
Who is yet all praise above.
Every day and every hour,
Every gift and every power,
Consecrate to Him alone,
Who hath claimed you for His own.*

*Teach us, Master, how to give
All we have and are to Thee;
Grant us, Saviour, while we live,
Holy, only Thine to be,
Henceforth be our calling high,
Thee to serve and glorify:
Ours no longer, but Thine own,
Thine forever, Thine alone.*

F. R. Havergal