Five vital commitments for Spiritual Effectiveness

In our day of freedom of choice, the mediaeval practice of making vows seems very anachronistic. Yet in Scripture there are many people who made vows – some foolish and others very wise. David said, ***"I must perform my vows to You, O God"***. (Ps. 56:12)

I think that if we are really concerned about our spiritual effectiveness – increasing our spiritual power, life, joy and personal revival, then we need to make solid commitments and we need to determine to keep them. When we fail, we can humbly repent and start over again. But we must always determine to keep those commitments.

If you object to the word 'commitment', try the word 'discipline'. This is not the bondage of legalism. The undisciplined life is spiritually very unproductive. We need the constant reminder that our 'old nature' (the flesh *'sarx'*) has nothing good in it. The way to spiritual effectiveness is daily to allow God's power to bring into subjection that 'old nature' (to crucify it!). So here are 5 suggested commitments/daily disciplines.

1. Deal thoroughly with sin

We tend to come up with interesting ways to minimise the convicting voice of conscience – we feel shame or we have a guilt complex. We like to explain it away in psychological terms or cultural terms. But if we are serious about our spiritual effectiveness, we must deal firmly with sin in our lives. This is not to aim at 'sinless perfection'.

Even John Wesley admitted late in his life that he hadn't yet obtained this state. But as we become conscious of sin in our lives, we must name in, repudiate it and trust God for complete deliverance from it. We must make a commitment that there will be no conscious, deliberate sin in our lives. If you are jealous, tell yourself you are jealous. If you have indulged in self-pity and don't feel appreciated, call it what it is: self-pity. If you lose your temper, don't call it 'righteous indignation'. So let's determine to deal thoroughly with sin.

2. Never own anything

This is not a plea for a simple lifestyle! We need to be delivered from the sense that we **possess** things – they are ours. It is the sense of **possessing** that hinders us. I'm told babies are born with their fists clenched – saying, in effect "This is mine". I have a two-year-old granddaughter who sometimes has an angry stubborn look on her face and says loudly "Mine!" Saying, "This is mine!" damages our spirits. A sense of liberty and joy comes to us when we have the feeling that we are just stewards of what we have. Some of you have been expelled from a country leaving much behind. This is hard.

I am not advocating that you should sell all you have or even some of it. But we need to understand that all we have been provided with is **not ours**, but God's. All that we are doing is just working for Him. This gets rid of a lot of tension because we don't need to worry about 'belongings' that are God's. He is able to take care of them. Don't value your housing, car, assets etc. too highly! You don't own them!

3. Never defend yourself

It is inherent in our old nature to defend ourselves. If we want to keep defending ourselves, God will let us do it and we will find it a painful process. You need an advocate to defend you. So turn over your defence to God. He will delight in defending you. Exodus 23:22 says, ***"I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries"***. So we don't have to fight for our reputation. The Lord will fight for us!

Yet we are so often defensive – defending our ministry, our reputation and making sure our gifts and talents are noticed. If we hear a rumour about ourselves, we try to run down the

source of the story. Nearly always this is a hopeless exercise. It is much better to turn yourself over wholly to the Lord and let Him defend you. He says, ***"No weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed and you shall confute every tongue that rises against you in judgment. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord … declares the Lord."*** (Is. 54:17)

4. Never pass on anything about others that could hurt them

If you know something that would hinder or hurt the reputation of a friend, co-worker or any believer, bury it forever. Remember, ***"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged …."*** (Mt. 7:1)

In response to God's goodness and kindness to you, be good and kind to all God's children. So keep your lips sealed when you are tempted to tell a negative story about a brother or sister.

5. Never accept any glory for what you have done

God does not give His glory to another. He doesn't even **share** a bit of His glory with another. We want to serve the Lord, but so often we want other people to know how well we are doing. We want to have a good reputation among our fellow believers. But this is very dangerous! The Lord Jesus gave up His reputation and so must we.

One of the German reformers in the 16th century preached a message on the Lord Jesus cleansing the temple. He said, "**Now there was nothing wrong with those men selling and buying there. It was necessary. The sin lay in their doing it for profit. They got a percentage on serving the Lord.**" And he continued, "**Anybody who serves the Lord for a commission – for what little bit of glory he can get out of it – is a merchant and he ought to be cast out of the temple!**"

Don't even think of getting any 'commission' from serving God. Be absolutely determined that God should get all the glory and you get none!

Well these are 5 commitments. Write them down. Put them in your Bible, but most importantly write them on your heart so that they become irrevocable. A man carrying a cross never walks back from death. By making these commitments you are further introducing the cross into your life. Never try to turn back.

Pray very often, "**O God, glorify Yourself here at my expense. Please send me the bill. Help me never to bargain with You. I am not going to set a price. Just glorify yourself here where I am.**"

These then are some of the secrets of spiritual effectiveness.