

## Guidance and Parental Authority

by Norman Grubb

*One question that frequently puzzles the young Christian is how to achieve a proper balance between **obedience to parents** and **obedience to God** when the two seemingly conflict. In an out-of-print biography, Norman Grubb gives some excellent commentary on just such a conflict. His brother-in-law, Alfred Buxton, had graduated from college and was planning to go on to medical school. He wanted to become a medical missionary, but God had other plans.*

Then came the unexpected. Alfred, the unobtrusive, the steady-going, announced that God had told him to drop his medicine and accompany C.T. Studd to the heart of Africa—at twenty years of age! Just like that! Was it God? Or was it Alfred Buxton and his youthful enthusiasm? C.T. Studd, the famous cricketer-missionary, was himself a burning enthusiast. Had he influenced Alfred? Or was it the glamor of accompanying such an outstanding personality? The family was agog. A clergyman altered an address he was giving to the Cambridge Inter-Collegiate Christian Union with the set purpose of preventing Alfred from going. His father wrote words of caution, gave the weight of his personal opinion against the proposal, yet always with the human acknowledgement that God alone was to speak the final word.

But a new Alfred had made an appearance, an Alfred who could weigh, could judge, could determine, and could stick to it. At the call of the Spirit there arose to the surface unplumbed capacities of rugged independence, and therefore of greatness, in that smooth and sunlit life-stream. The sound of the cataract could now be heard, the roar of the rapids, the rush of waters necessary to the construction of the power-house. "It is a mighty step and I wouldn't and couldn't do it, 'if the Lord go not up with me,'" he wrote to his father. "I've counted the cost and it makes it hard after the home we've had." Then followed four texts which had "sunk pretty deep."

For eight months the battle raged. It was the pivotal period of that young life. Rightly did Shakespeare say: "There is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune"; and C.T. Studd, "God gives a man one great chance." Missionary history depended upon it. Was there to emerge from the shell of an average personality a man who would be great, not because of what he was in himself, but because he could be single-eyed, could wholly follow the Lord his God, and could hear and obey the inner voice of the Spirit Who alone reveals the true plan for a life and leads it to its fullest fruition? Or was he, through heeding man rather than God, to shrink back to the level of an ordinary existence?

The issue hung long in the balance. Sometimes the Spirit's voice prevailed, sometimes man's. There was bound to be this interlude of doubt and hesitation. It is the only high road to full assurance. Only by such mental travail can the inexperience of spiritual youth be gradually replaced by a mature ability to discern between the true and the false. Light often came through the Scriptures—pure light—and he knew it to be from God. Then would follow a reaction: "I started to ask men's advice and got in a muddle." One factor alone was decisive— Alfred's will. Deep in the center of his being his mind was made up. When he finally saw the light, he would follow. On just that slender thread hangs all the difference in all men's lives between greatness and mediocrity.

Stage by stage the battle was fought. He wrote his parents: "I don't know a bit what is the right thing. One thing is certain—that if no one else goes, in fact if Mr. Studd has to go alone, I'll go, if you'll let me, and go through with him."

A month later: "I'm afraid I can't help feeling that I ought to go to the Sudan this summer. It is not in any way that I am carried away with enthusiasm. When I think about it, it only seems to me, humanly speaking, 'a game decidedly not worth the candle.' I have been thinking about it ever since I read in Genesis 46:3, '*Fear not to go down into Egypt: for there I will make of thee a great nation.*' I have no wish to go if it is not the right thing; but I feel if it is, I cannot hang back, or perhaps I shall not be given a great work again. I will in no way hurry and will not think of going unless I can say that I *know* it is right."

His father wisely faced him with all the difficulties: "I do deeply feel with you. I think it is very doubtful whether you would get consent to your going, as all the mission has to be approved by the Sirdar. In Government service, no one under the rank of a captain seems to be sent to such lonely places. And for that, they must be probably twenty-six or twenty-eight. Apart from that, I feel that you are immature, not only physically, but spiritually, to go forth on such work. Most of those whom God mightily used in the Bible, were very mature. Moses . . . then Paul . . . I think you might well take it to heart that everyone thinks you are much too young. Mr. N. H. [the clergyman who spoke to the C.I.C.C.U.] feels acutely that you ought not to go, and spoke to me about it most abruptly. This is not decisive. God still might thrust someone out contrary to the opinion of some of His mature saints. But it ought to guide, unless you have the clearest light the other way. I will certainly stand by you in every way, whichever way you feel is of God. But my judgment before God is that you should postpone going for, say, four years."

Four months later there was still uncertainty: "I don't know yet about Africa. I need to be sure. I fear lest I shall be influenced by man." A month more and, "I still can't help having Africa always in my thoughts."

The final marching orders came in a strange, yet most satisfactory way. It was his twenty-first birthday, Sunday, November 2, 1912, and he asked God to give him "just one more revelation of His will." In the morning he heard a sermon on "*Do thy diligence to come quickly*"—the importance of doing God's will before youthful enthusiasm was dead—backed up by another text, "*I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not.*" This went home. Then in the evening he went to hear his father preach. It was his father—who had always advised but never tried to force, and had persistently urged upon him that the last word must be from God—who was God's final mouthpiece. The text was that great word to hesitant Gideon, "*Go in this thy might.*" God had spoken. That night he told his father, who listened with bowed head.

*In an appendix to his biography of his brother-in-law, Norman Grubb added these additional words of explanation on the question of divine guidance which seemingly conflicts with parental guidance.*

Alfred Buxton's action in dropping his medical training and going to the heart of Africa when only twenty-one will raise the question in many minds, Was he right? Should a young man go against the advice of his parents? To what extent ought the fact to weigh with him that his education had cost his parents a large sum of money, and that therefore they had a right to advise him on his career? Is it not, anyhow, bad for character to start a course of study and drop it in the middle? The answer is to be found in the correspondence quoted. Hasty action would have been wrong. Alfred took much time. The final decision was only made more than six months after he first made public his call—with considerable wavering in between—and he did what his father had asked him to do, waited until he knew God had guided.

His father's action was equally right. He gave his faithful opinion against his going and never changed it. But he never allowed the parental voice to take the place of the voice of God. He never claimed for himself the right of final control over his son's choice, which belongs only to the Indwelling Spirit. If children often act in the haste and immaturity of

youth, parents, also, often sit in the seat of God and put human hands on the wheel of their children's lives where only God has the right to the helm.

The ideal is a mutual seeking of God's will on the basis of open fellowship, parents and child together recognizing the lordship of the Spirit. If parents, however, oppose and obstruct, children must seek a balance between the honor due to them and obedience to their Lord who said, *"If any man hate not father, mother, . . . he cannot be My disciple."* That is to say, there must always be a spirit of humility and gratefulness to one's parents, whatever their attitude to the claims of Christ may be; but if their wishes, or even orders, conflict with higher orders from God, which are confirmed by waiting on Him, then obedience must be given at all costs to the Father in heaven, even though such action has the appearance of disobedience and ungratefulness towards them. Such, surely, is the meaning of the "hatred" Christ enjoins in Luke 14:26.

The attitude and correspondence of both father and son in this narrative form a splendid example of balanced investigation into, and final adherence to, the will of God.