

Walking Worthily

PAUL tells us, in 1 Thess. 2:11, what he did when among the brethren in Thessalonica. "Ye know," he says, appealing to their memory, "how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory." What Paul did at Thessalonica, he did among the brethren everywhere else, of course; and, if he were with us, he would do the same thing here. He would charge us to "walk worthy of God," and he would do it constantly. He would not be content to lay down our duty clearly at the start, and then go on, taking it for granted; he would "harp" on the subject constantly. At least, this is what he did at Ephesus. His own testimony is this: "Ye (Ephesians) know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons. . . . Therefore watch, and remember that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears" (Acts 20:18, 31).

What Paul did himself he told Timothy to do after him: "Be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine"; and so to Titus he says: "These things I will that thou affirm constantly" (Titus 3:8).

What he advised Timothy and Titus to do in the first century, he would recommend everyone taking hold of the word to do in the nineteenth; for the work is the same and its difficulties are the same now as then, though the form of surrounding circumstances has changed. The work now, if a work is doing, is the work in which Paul and others were engaged—the work of taking out and purifying a peculiar people for Christ; and the principal difficulty springs now, as then, from the almost unconquerable bias of the human mind in favour of the present evil world.

What phase of the truth of Christ is it that requires to be the subject of this constant inculcation which Paul exemplified? Let the epistles of Paul supply the answer; for what Paul did by word of mouth, we have here illustrated by the pen. It is the question of our moral relation to God and our moral relation to the wicked world in which we live that supplies the chief material of his discourse. There are things that there is no need to "affirm constantly." We do not need to "affirm constantly" that there is a God. We do not need to affirm constantly that man is mortal. We do not need to affirm constantly that Christ is the manifestation of God, and that the kingdom of God will be established on the earth. These things have, of course, to be kept constantly prominent in the presentation of the truth to a fluctuating audience of strangers; but so far as the brethren are concerned, they are in the position of foundation—under the house and out of sight. Once intellectually perceived as the teaching of the word, they are easily retained; and become weakened instead of strengthened by constant affirmation. But it is not so with the class of things which Paul made the subject of his entreaties among the brethren at Ephesus, night and day, for three years: these are easily forgotten. The tendency of the natural man is against the memory and the practice of them. Danger is constant, and, therefore, warning needs to be constant also.

The thing that Paul would always exhort us to do, if he were among us, would be to "walk worthy of God." This defines the matter comprehensively; presents it clearly, and fixes its character unmistakably. Need we be at a loss to decide our course, as saints, if we remember that it is to be "worthy of God"? The application of this single test will always, with an earnest man, easily settle controversies on practical questions which men of another type find enveloped in fog. Even earnest men need to apply it energetically. The desire to

protect the interests or secure the honours of the present life, is liable to mystify a man's reason when they are interfered with by obligations that appertain to the house of Christ. It is a dangerous sophistry that tries to make the path of wrong appear right, or a little less dangerous than the word represents it to be. This is a sophistry of which we are all in danger, because the love of the present world is innate, and is liable to lead us to favour a loose construction of the commandments of Christ, which is the first step to ruin.

It is not for us to trust ourselves in deciding what sort of a walk is worthy of God. We must be guided solely by what is revealed. We are safe in taking the cue from the Scriptures. We are in danger if we trust to our own thoughts, and still more so if we yield to the sentiments current in society. Here we have to wage a constant war, in which we ought to make victory our strenuous aim. It is a warfare in which he only that overcomes will obtain the benefit. To be overcome here is to lose all. Men have certain notions how we ought to think, how we ought to talk, how we ought to use our leisure, how we ought to use our money and our abilities, how we ought to carry ourselves in society, and what we ought to aim at. This is one school, large, flourishing, and popular. The Spirit of God, by the apostles and prophets, has promulgated another set of notions on these subjects. This is another school, which is the opposite of prosperous at present. The two schools are incompatible. We cannot belong to both. It is Jesus who has said, "No man can serve two masters."

In this matter the world is one master and teacher, and the Spirit of God another. Our leaning to the one or the other is of vital importance. Paul thus sharply defines it: "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, THEY ARE THE SONS OF GOD." Our standing before God depends upon whether we are led by the Spirit of God or the spirit of the world. A man led by the Spirit thinks and acts in harmony with the Spirit as our instructor in the word. He may not do this all at once, but if he progress in the Spirit's tuition, he will come to it, and find himself the subject of a process of transformation which ends in making "a new creature." To reach this conclusion, however, he must submit himself to the Spirit's influence in the way the Spirit has appointed. The Spirit has given us the word as the means by which its mind is to be learnt; and it has given us this word in such a form that this "mind of the Spirit" cannot be apprehended apart from a constant and diligent perusal of the word containing it. "Here a little, and there a little, line upon line, and precept upon precept," is the principle of its construction. Its wisdom is diffused over all its contents. It is not concentrated anywhere. In this respect it is unlike a human composition which, in chapters and sections, aims at exhausting a particular topic. It is like the inner curtain of the Mosaic tabernacle: the blue and the purple and the fine-twined linen and the golden thread are everywhere through the fabric. It is, however, unlike that fabric in this, that in some parts of it you find treasure not to be found in other parts. This peculiarity has two results: to acquire the mind of the Spirit revealed in the word, we must make ourselves acquainted with the whole, and the reading of it is a constant feast. It never loses its relish, but becomes sweeter to the taste with use. In this it is unlike all other books.

Its delineation of a walk that is "worthy of God" is clear and reasonable and satisfactory. Let us look at it. It deals with the state of the affections and the nature of actions. It lays hold of both, and dictates certain important rules. In both departments it claims that we be conformed to its standard. It has something to say to us as to what we are to love and not to love, as well as telling us what we are to do and what we are not to do. It demands of us that we love certain things, and love not other things. It says: "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." "Thou shalt love the

Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" These are divine specifications. Of what avail will our knowledge of the truth be if we fail in these essentials of true saintship? Jesus spoke with a meaning when he said, "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." It would seem from the sentiments of some as if the doctrines of Christ, theoretically accepted, were all -- as if a man might be a lover of pleasure and a follower of Christ at the same time -- as if there was no such thing as self-denial, no such thing as offering our bodies living sacrifices, no such thing as strangers and pilgrims, passing the time of our sojourning here in fear. We must be on our guard against the influence of those who come to us with the name of Christ on their lips, but with a denial of Christ in their lives. The saints of God are not of this world, either in speech, pleasure, policy or action. Christ is their type, and Paul their pattern by Christ's appointment (1 Tim. 1:16). Christ and Paul are the lead which they follow, as Paul exhorted: "Be ye followers of me, as I am also of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). The joint voice of Christ and Paul his apostle is the voice of the Shepherd, than which they will hear no other.

The spirit of Christ is the spirit of every true saint, and it is written that if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his. The spirit of Christ is one thing and the spirit of the world quite another. The spirit of Christ is a spirit of zeal for God; the spirit of the world has no God in it. The spirit of Christ is a spirit of obedience; the spirit of the world is a spirit of defiance against all submission. The spirit of Christ is a spirit of engrossing interest in the purpose of God in the earth and His will among men; the spirit of the world is a spirit of total indifference to these, as if they had no existence. The spirit of Christ is a spirit of self-sacrifice for the benefit of others; the spirit of the world is a spirit of self-ministration, self-protection and self-avengement. The spirit of Christ is a spirit of prayer and a spirit of compassion; the spirit of the world is the opposite of these. The spirit of Christ is a spirit of sorrow, a spirit of walking with God, a spirit of standing apart from the world, a spirit of praying not for the world, a spirit of holiness, a spirit of faith, a spirit of chaste and dignified and pure speech; while the spirit of the world is a spirit of jollity, a spirit of standing far off from God, a spirit of being of the world and with the world, a spirit of insensibility to righteousness, a spirit of unbelief, a spirit of ribald talk and effervescent folly. The two spirits are incompatible, and the two peoples are incompatible, and it is no use trying to act the part of both. It cannot be done; it is a moral impossibility. The man who thinks he can do it is deceiving himself, and will find, like another professor, that he has "neither part nor lot in the matter." We are not to go out of the world, but while, of necessity, living therein, we are to keep ourselves unspotted in not partaking of the evil that is in it. Christ and the apostles have shown us how this is to be done, and, surely, no man is so unwise as to think he can show a better way.

To "walk worthy of God," then, is first to have the heart where Christ's heart was, and then to let the words of our lips and the deeds of our hands follow suit. Christ's heart was fixed on the Father and the Father's will, and the Father's work and the Father's purpose in the days to come. He had no other interest, no other love, though this, indeed, truly comprehends all interests and all love. The world hated him: how could it do otherwise? He testified of it that its works were evil. The world did not hate his brothers, because they bore no such testimony, but were content to earn the good graces of the world by a friendly deference to what was going on around them. They joined in that receiving honour one of another which Jesus declared to be the great stumbling-block to faith in his day (John 5:44), and which continues to be the characteristic of the enemy of God to this. Have principles changed with the lapse of eighteen centuries? Nay, verily. The world is the same, as we sadly find, and

Christ, though we see him not, is the same yesterday, today, and for ever. He comes anon to deliver from the present evil world such as, like himself, are not of it, but who call on the Father, who, without respect of persons, will judge according to every man's work. The Lord's choice will rest on those who devote themselves to the doing of the will of his Father: so he often declared on earth. The will is that we make no friendship with a world which is full of everything contrary to His mind; but that standing apart from it, we shine as lights in it, testifying against it, and leaving its pleasures, its honours, its politics and its wars to its own children, in whom He has no delight. His intention is to destroy the system of things that goes to make up the world in its present constitution. The coming of Christ is to take vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 1:8). These words are not written in vain. The purpose of God is to destroy the world as it now is, and to establish a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. Shall we build that which God means to destroy?

Paul warned the brethren night and day with tears: do we need the warning less? Rather do we not stand in more imperative need of it? An apostasy of centuries has trampled the whole system of divine ideas in the dust, and there is a danger that with nothing but the written word to reclaim us from the abounding darkness, we may receive an inadequate impression of what is required of us. There is danger that we may stop short at the beggarly idea that sonship to God consists of knowing the nature of man and the purpose of God, and being baptized and breaking bread. There is danger of our failing to see that Christ wants men with whom he will be the ruling affection, and with whom the love of God prevails unto sanctification and separation from a world that knows not God and obeys not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is a danger of our being content with the external compliances of saintship, having a name to live while dead, professing to be Christ's while remaining in league with the world for which he did not pray, and which he will shortly destroy, and us with it, if we make ourselves of it. No wise man will be content in this matter with anything short of the genuine apostolic ideal. It is better to leave the truth altogether alone than to profess it in a half-hearted way, which, while sufficient to spoil the present for us, will fail to secure the future. It is better, in this matter, to burn our boats, like the Roman general, and leave no retreat.

These urgent words will seem kind words by and by. The judgments of God are impending over this generation. The world is divinely declared to be ripe for them. It does not appear so to such as judge after the flesh: that is, who judge it in the light of human thoughts. To them, the world appears tolerably well-conditioned in moral matters. With so much church and chapel-going and charity money-spending and education-promoting and scientific nature-investigating, the world in such eyes appears righteous. They forget that righteousness is a matter of divine estimation, and that the first principle of righteousness relates to men's attitude to God—God the first and last, and who will yet be all in all upon earth as now among the angels. Men may be very civilized one to another and very barbarous towards God. Judgment came on Jerusalem 1,800 years ago, not because there was any lack of mutual, deference or refinement, or alms-giving or prayer-saying, or synagogue attending or knowledge-cultivating. The sacrifices were offered according to the law and the feasts held in their appointed seasons, actually with more regularity than they had been at any former period in their history. But the true fragrance was wanting. Sincere recognition of God had ceased. The charge made by Daniel against Belshazzar had become applicable to the Jewish nation: "The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified." The things they did—the performances they went through, the alms they gave, the prayers they offered, the public services they held were all done for man's sake and not for

God's sake: so that God's own appointments became an abomination to Him, as saith the Spirit by Isaiah: "Incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with: it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth." The state of mind in which the law was obeyed was the principal part of the service required. It is a common mistake to suppose that the law was limited to external compliances. Moses, on the contrary, spoke to them at the beginning thus: "And now Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul?" (Deut. 10:12). The very essence of all the service of the law was the fervent recognition and intelligent service of the Creator and Proprietor of all things: but this had vanished from all but a few, and the body politic of Israel was a spiritual corpse. So it is in our day with the Gentiles, and worse; for with the Jews there was, at least, the form of the institutions which God Himself had appointed, but among the Gentiles there is not even the form of godliness as originally delivered by the hands of the apostles. The doctrines of Jesus are not to be found in the pale of the dominant churches, and the institutions practised are not of his appointment. Add to this the prevalence of unfaith, insensibility to all divine relations and universal disobedience of the commandments of God, and we get some glimpse of a state of things which is divinely declared to be a ripe harvest of wickedness. From this state of things we are labouring to be delivered, and for the accomplishment of this object it is necessary now, as in the first century, to iterate incessantly the instruction and warnings that tend to the purification of the house of God.

(Taken from Seasons of Comfort" Volume 1 Pages 193-198 by Bro. Roberts)