**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**1 THESSALONIANS-003**. **WALKING WORTHILY by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Walk worthy of God."*

*1 Thessalonians 2:12*

Here we have the whole law of Christian conduct in a nutshell. There may be many detailed commandments, but they can all be deduced from this one. We are lifted up above the region of petty prescriptions, and breathe a bracing mountain air. Instead of regulations, very many and very dry, we have a principle which needs thought and sympathy in order to apply it, and is to be carried out by the free action of our own judgments.

Now it is to be noticed that there are a good many other passages in the New Testament in which, in similar fashion, the whole sum of Christian conduct is reduced to a walking worthy of some certain thing or other, and I have thought that it might aid in appreciating the many-sidedness and all-sufficiency of the great principles into which Christianity crystallises the law of our life, if we just gather these together and set them before you consecutively.

They are these: we are told in our text to walk worthy of God. Then again, we are enjoined, in other places, to walk worthy of the Lord, who is Christ. Or again, of the Gospel of Christ. Or again, of the calling wherewith we were called. Or again, of the name of saints. And if you put all these together, you will get many sides of one thought, the rule of Christian life as gathered into a single expression--correspondence with, and conformity to, a certain standard.

**I. And first of all, we have this passage of my text, and the other one to which I have referred, Walking worthy of the Lord, by whom we are to understand Christ.**

We may put these together and say that the whole sum of Christian duty lies in conformity to the character of a Divine Person with whom we have loving relations.

The Old Testament says: Be ye holy, for I the Lord your God am holy. The New Testament says: Be ye imitators of God, and walk in love. So then, whatever of flashing brightness and infinite profundity in that divine nature is far beyond our apprehension and grasp, there are in that divine nature elements--and those the best and divinest in it--which it is perfectly within the power of every man to copy.

Is there anything in God that is more Godlike than righteousness and love? And is there any difference in essence between a man's righteousness and God's;--between a man's love and God's? The same gases make combustion in the sun and on the earth, and the spectroscope tells you that it is so. The same radiant brightness that flames burning in the love, and flashes white in the purity of God, even that may be reproduced in man.

Love is one thing, all the universe over. Other elements of the bond that unites us to God are rather correspondent in us to what we find in Him. Our concavity, so to speak, answers to His convexity; our hollowness to His fulness; our emptiness to His all-sufficiency. So our faith, for instance, lays hold upon His faithfulness, and our obedience grasps, and bows before, His commanding will. But the love with which I lay hold of Him is like the love with which He lays hold on me; and righteousness and purity, howsoever different may be their accompaniments in an Infinite and uncreated Nature from what they have in our limited and bounded and progressive being, in essence are one. So, Be ye holy, for I am holy; Walk in the light as He is in the light, is the law available for all conduct; and the highest divine perfections, if I may speak of pre-eminence among them, are the imitable ones, whereby He becomes our Example and our Pattern.

Let no man say that such an injunction is vague or hopeless. You must have a perfect ideal if you are to live at all by an ideal. There cannot be any flaws in your pattern if the pattern is to be of any use. You aim at the stars, and if you do not hit them you may progressively approach them. We need absolute perfection to strain after, and one day--blessed be His name--we shall attain it. Try to walk worthy of God and you will find out how tight that precept grips, and how close it fits.

The love and the righteousness which are to become the law of our lives, are revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Whatever may sound impracticable in the injunction to imitate God assumes a more homely and possible shape when it becomes an injunction to follow Jesus. And just as that form of the precept tends to make the law of conformity to the divine nature more blessed and less hopelessly above us, so it makes the law of conformity to the ideal of goodness less cold and unsympathetic. It makes all the difference to our joyfulness and freedom whether we are trying to obey a law of duty, seen only too clearly to be binding, but also above our reach, or whether we have the law in a living Person whom we have learned to love. In the one case there stands upon a pedestal above us a cold perfection, white, complete, marble; in the other case there stands beside us a living law in pattern, a Brother, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh; whose hand we can grasp; whose heart we can trust, and of whose help we can be sure. To say to me: Follow the ideal of perfect righteousness, is to relegate me to a dreary, endless struggling; to say to me, Follow your Brother, and be like your Father, is to bring warmth and hope and liberty into all my effort. The word that says, Walk worthy of God, is a royal law, the perfect law of perfect freedom.

Again, when we say, Walk worthy of God, we mean two things--one, Do after His example, and the other, Render back to Him what He deserves for what He has done to you. And so this law bids us measure, by the side of that great love that died on the Cross for us all, our poor imperfect returns of gratitude and of service. He has lavished all His treasure on you; what have you brought him back? He has given you the whole wealth of His tender pity, of His forgiving mercy, of His infinite goodness. Do you adequately repay such lavish love? Has He not sown much and reaped little in all our hearts? Has He not poured out the fulness of His affection, and have we not answered Him with a few grudging drops squeezed from our hearts? Oh! brethren! Walk worthy of the Lord, and neither dishonour Him by your conduct as professing children of His, nor affront Him by the wretched refuse and remnants of your devotion and service that you bring back to Him in response to His love to you.

**II. Now a word about the next form of this all-embracing precept.**

The whole law of our Christian life may be gathered up in another correspondence, Walk worthy of the Gospel (Phil. 1:27), in a manner conformed to that great message of God's love to us.

That covers substantially the same ground as we have already been going over, but it presents the same ideas in a different light. It presents the Gospel as a rule of conduct. Now people have always been apt to think of it more as a message of deliverance than as a practical guide, as we all need to make an effort to prevent our natural indolence and selfishness from making us forget that the Gospel is quite as much a rule of conduct as a message of pardon.

It is both by the same act. In the very facts on which our redemption depends lies the law of our lives.

What was Paul's Gospel? According to Paul's own definition of it, it was this: How that Jesus Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures. And the message that I desire now to bring to all you professing Christians is this: Do not always be looking at Christ's Cross only as your means of acceptance. Do not only be thinking of Christ's Passion as that which has barred for you the gates of punishment, and has opened for you the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven. It has done all that; but if you are going to stop there you have only got hold of a very maimed and imperfect edition of the Gospel. The Cross is your pattern, as well as the anchor of your hope and the ground of your salvation, if it is anything at all to you. And it is not the ground of your salvation and the anchor of your hope unless it is your pattern. It is the one in exactly the same degree in which it is the other.

So all self-pleasing, all harsh insistence on your own claims, all neglect of suffering and sorrow and sin around you, comes under the lash of this condemnation: They are not worthy of the Gospel. And all unforgivingness of spirit and of temper in individuals and in nations, in public and in private matters, that, too, is in flagrant contradiction to the principles that are taught on the Cross to which you say you look for your salvation. Have you got forgiveness, and are you going out from the presence-chamber of the King to take your brother by the throat for the beggarly coppers that he owes you, and say: Pay me what thou owest! when the Master has forgiven you all that great mountain of indebtedness which you owe Him? Oh, my brother! if Christian men and women would only learn to take away the scales from their eyes and souls; not looking at Christ's Cross with less absolute trustfulness, as that by which all their salvation comes, but also learning to look at it as closely and habitually as yielding the pattern to which their lives should be conformed, and would let the heart-melting thankfulness which it evokes when gazed at as the ground of our hope prove itself true by its leading them to an effort at imitating that great love, and so walking worthy of the Gospel, how their lives would be transformed! It is far easier to fetter your life with yards of red-tape prescriptions--do this, do not do that--far easier to out-pharisee the Pharisees in punctilious scrupulosities, than it is honestly, and for one hour, to take the Cross of Christ as the pattern of your lives, and to shape yourselves by that.

One looks round upon a lethargic, a luxurious, a self-indulgent, a self-seeking, a world-besotted professing Church, and asks: Are these the people on whose hearts a cross is stamped? Do these men--or rather let us say, do we live as becometh the Gospel which proclaims the divinity of self-sacrifice, and that the law of a perfect human life is perfect self-forgetfulness, even as the secret of the divine nature is perfect love? Walk worthy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

**III. Then again, there is another form of this same general prescription which suggests to us a kindred and yet somewhat different standard.**

We are also bidden to bring our lives into conformity to, and correspondence with, or, as the Bible has it, to walk worthy of the calling wherewith we are called (Eph. 4:1).

God summons or invites us, and summons us to what? The words which follow our text answer, Who calleth you into His own kingdom and glory. All you Christian people have been invited, and if you are Christians you have accepted the invitation; and all you men and women, whether you are Christians or not, have been and are being invited and summoned into a state and a world (for the reference is to the future life), in which God's will is supreme, and all wills are moulded into conformity with that, and into a state and a world in which all shall--because they submit to His will--partake of His glory, the fulness of His uncreated light.

That being the aim of the summons, that being the destiny that is held out before us all, ought not that destiny and the prospect of what we may be in the future, to fling some beams of guiding brightness on to the present?

Men that are called to high functions prepare themselves therefor. If you knew that you were going away to Australia in six months, would you not be beginning to get your outfit ready? You Christian men profess to believe that you have been called to a condition in which you will absolutely obey God's will, and be the loyal subjects of His kingdom, and in which you will partake of God's glory. Well then, obey His will here, and let some scattered sparklets of that uncreated light that is one day going to flood your soul lie upon your face to-day. Do not go and cut your lives into two halves, one of them all contradictory to that which you expect in the other, but bring a harmony between the present, in all its weakness and sinfulness, and that great hope and certain destiny that blazes on the horizon of your hope, as the joyful state to which you have been invited. Walk worthy of the calling to which you are called.

And again, that same thought of the destiny should feed our hope, and make us live under its continual inspiration. A walk worthy of such a calling and such a caller should know no despondency, nor any weary, heartless lingering, as with tired feet on a hard road. Brave good cheer, undimmed energy, a noble contempt of obstacles, a confidence in our final attainment of that purity and glory which is not depressed by consciousness of present failure--these are plainly the characteristics which ought to mark the advance of the men in whose ears such a summons from such lips rings as their marching orders.

And a walk worthy of our calling will turn away from earthly things. If you believe that God has summoned you to His kingdom and glory, surely, surely, that should deaden in your heart the love and the care for the trifles that lie by the wayside. Surely, surely, if that great voice is inviting, and that merciful hand is beckoning you into the light, and showing you what you may possess there, it is not walking according to that summons if you go with your eyes fixed upon the trifles at your feet, and your whole heart absorbed in this present fleeting world. Unworldliness, in its best and purest fashion--by which I mean not only a contempt for material wealth and all that it brings, but the sitting loose by everything that is beneath the stars--unworldliness is the only walk that is worthy of the calling wherewith ye are called.

And if you hear that voice ringing like a trumpet call, or a commander's shout on the battlefield, into your ears, ever to stimulate you, to rebuke your lagging indifference; if you are ever conscious in your inmost hearts of the summons to His kingdom and glory, then, no doubt, by a walk worthy of it, you will make your calling sure; and there shall an entrance be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom.

**IV. And the last of the phases of this prescription which I have to deal with is this.**

The whole Christian duty is further crystallised into the one command, to walk in a manner conformed to, and corresponding with, the character which is impressed upon us.

In the last chapter of the Epistle to the Romans (verse 2), we read about a very small matter, that it is to be done worthily of the saints. It is only about the receiving of a good woman who was travelling from Corinth to Rome, and extending hospitality to her in such a manner as became professing Christians; but the very minuteness of the details to which the great principle is applied points a lesson. The biggest principle is not too big to be brought down to the narrowest details, and that is the beauty of principles as distinguished from regulations. Regulations try to be minute, and, however minute you make them, some case always starts up that is not exactly provided for in them, and so the regulations come to nothing. A principle does not try to be minute, but it casts its net wide and it gathers various cases into its meshes. Like the fabled tent in the old legend that could contract so as to have room for but one man, or expand wide enough to hold an army, so this great principle of Christian conduct can be brought down to giving Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church at Cenchrea, good food and a comfortable lodging, and any other little kindnesses, when she comes to Rome. And the same principle may be widened out to embrace and direct us in the largest tasks and most difficult circumstances.

Worthily of saints--the name is an omen, and carries in it rules of conduct. The root idea of saint is one separated to God, and the secondary idea which flows from that is one who is pure.

All Christians are saints. They are consecrated and set apart for God's service, and in the degree in which they are conscious of and live out that consecration, they are pure.

So their name, or rather the great fact which their name implies, should be ever before them, a stimulus and a law. We are bound to remember that we are consecrated, separated as God's possession, and that therefore purity is indispensable. The continual consciousness of this relation and its resulting obligations would make us recoil from impurity as instinctively as the sensitive plant shuts up its little green fingers when anything touches it; or as the wearer of a white robe will draw it up high above the mud on a filthy pavement. Walk worthily of saints is another way of saying, Be true to your own best selves. Work up to the highest ideal of your character. That is far more wholesome than to be always looking at our faults and failures, which depress and tempt us to think that the actual is the measure of the possible, and the past or present of the future. There is no fear of self-conceit or of a mistaken estimate of ourselves. The more clearly we keep our best and deepest self before our consciousness, the more shall we learn a rigid judgment of the miserable contradictions to it in our daily outward life, and even in our thoughts and desires. It is a wholesome exhortation, when it follows these others of which we have been speaking (and not else), which bids Christians remember that they are saints and live up to their name.

A Christian's inward and deepest self is better than his outward life. We have all convictions in our inmost hearts which we do not work out, and beliefs that do not influence us as we know they ought to do, and sometimes wish that they did. By our own fault our lives but imperfectly show their real inmost principle. Friction always wastes power before motion is produced.

So then, we may well gather together all our duties in this final form of the all-comprehensive law, and say to ourselves, Walk worthily of saints. Be true to your name, to your best selves, to your deepest selves. Be true to your separation for God's service, and to the purity which comes from it. Be true to the life which God has implanted in you. That life may be very feeble and covered by a great deal of rubbish, but it is divine. Let it work, let it out. Do not disgrace your name.

These are the phases of the law of Christian conduct. They reach far, they fit close, they penetrate deeper than the needle points of minute regulations. If you will live in a manner corresponding to the character, and worthy of the love of God, as revealed in Christ, and in conformity with the principles that are enthroned upon His Cross, and in obedience to the destiny held forth in your high calling, and in faithfulness to the name that He Himself has impressed upon you, then your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the painful and punctilious pharisaical obedience to outward commands, and all things lovely and of good report will spring to life in your hearts and bear fruit in your lives.

One last word--all these exhortations go on the understanding that you are a Christian, that you have taken Christ for your Saviour, and are resting upon Him, and recognising in Him the revelation of God, and in His Cross the foundation of your hope; that you have listened to, and yielded to, the divine summons, and that you have a right to be called a saint. Is that presumption true about you, my friend? If it is not, Christianity thinks that it is of no use wasting time talking to you about conduct.

It has another word to speak to you first, and after you have heard and accepted it, there will be time enough to talk to you about rules for living. The first message which Christ sends to you by my lips is, Trust your sinful selves to Him as your only all-sufficient Saviour. When you have accepted Him, and are leaning on Him with all your weight of sin and suffering, and loving Him with your ransomed heart, then, and not till then, will you be in a position to hear His law for your life, and to obey it. Then, and not till then, will you appreciate the divine simplicity and breadth of the great command to walk worthy of God, and the divine tenderness and power of the motive which enforces it, and prints it on yielding and obedient hearts, even the dying love and Cross of His Son. Then, and not till then, will you know how the voice from heaven that calls you to His kingdom stirs the heart like the sound of a trumpet, and how the name which you bear is a perpetual spur to heroic service and priestly purity. Till then, the word which we would plead with you to listen to and accept is that great answer of our Lord's to those who came to Him for a rule of conduct, instead of for the gift of life: This is the work of God, that ye should believe on Him whom He hath sent.