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

**GENESIS-006. WITH, BEFORE, AFTER by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Enoch walked with God,"*

*Genesis 5:22*

*"Walk before Me."*

*Genesis 17:1*

*"Ye shall walk after the Lord your God."*

*Deuteronomy 13:4*

You will have anticipated, I suppose, my purpose in doing what I very seldom do--cutting little snippets out of different verses and putting them together. You see that these three fragments, in their resemblances and in their differences, are equally significant and instructive. They concur in regarding life as a walk--a metaphor which expresses continuity, so that every man's life is a whole, which expresses progress, which expresses change, and which implies a goal. They agree in saying that God must he brought into a life somehow, and in some aspect, if that life is to be anything else but an aimless wandering, if it is to tend to the point to which every human life should attain. But then they diverge, and, if we put them together, they say to us that there are three different ways in which we ought to bring God into our life. We should walk with Him, like Enoch; we should walk before Him, as Abraham was bade to do; and we should walk after Him, as the command to do was given to all Israel. And these three prepositions, with, before, after, attached to the general idea of life as a walk, give us a triple aspect--which yet is, of course, fundamentally, one--of the way in which life may be ennobled, dignified, calmed, hallowed, focussed, and concentrated by the various relations into which we enter with Him. So I take the three of them.

**I. Enoch walked with God.**

That is a sweet, simple, easily intelligible, and yet lofty way of putting the notion which we bring into a more abstract and less impressive shape when we talk about communion with God. Two men travelling along a road keep each other company. How can two walk together except they be agreed? The companion is at our side all the same, though the mists may have come down and we cannot see Him. We can hear His voice, we can grasp His hand, we can catch the echoes of His steps. We know He is there, and that is enough. Enoch and God walked together, by the simple exercise of the faith that fills the Invisible with one great, loving Face. By a continuous, definite effort, as we are going through the bustle of daily life, and amid all the pettiness and perplexities and monotonies that make up our often weary and always heavy days, we can realise to ourselves that He is of a truth at our sides, and by purity of life and heart we can bring Him nearer, and can make ourselves more conscious of His nearness. For, brethren, the one thing that parts a man from God, and makes it impossible for a heart to expatiate in the thought of His presence, is the contrariety to His will in our conduct. The slightest invisible film of mist that comes across the blue abyss of the mighty sky will blot out the brightest of the stars, and we may sometimes not be able to see the mist, and only know that it is there because we do not see the planet. So unconscious sin may steal in between us and God, and we shall no longer be able to say, I walk with Him.

The Roman Catholics talk, in their mechanical way, of bringing down all the spiritual into the material and formal, about the practice of the presence of God. It is an ugly phrase, but it means a great thing, that Christian people ought, very much more than they do, to aim, day by day, and amidst their daily duties, at realising that most elementary thought which, like a great many other elementary thoughts, is impotent because we believe it so utterly, that wherever we are, we may have Him with us. It is the secret of blessedness, of tranquillity, of power, of everything good and noble.

I am a stranger with Thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were, said the Psalmist of old. If he had left out these two little words, with Thee, he would have been uttering a tragic complaint; but when they come in, all that is painful, all that is solitary, all that is transient, bitterly transient, in the long succession of the generations that have passed across earth's scene, and have not been kindred to it, is cleared away and changed into gladness. Never mind, though you are a stranger, if you have that companion. Never mind, though you are only a sojourner; if you have Him with you, whatever passes He will not pass; and though we dwell here in a system to which we do not belong, and its transiency and our transiency bring with them many sorrows, when we can say, Lord! Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations, we are at home, and that eternal home will never pass.

Enoch walked with God, and, of course, God took him, There was nothing else for it, and there could be no other end, for a life of communion with God here has in it the prophecy and the pledge of a life of eternal union hereafter. So, then, practise the presence of God. An old mystic says: If I can tell how many times to-day I have thought about God, I have not thought about Him often enough. Walk with Him by faith, by effort, by purity.

**II. And now take the other aspect suggested by the other word God spoke to Abraham: I am the Almighty God, walk before Me and be thou perfect.**

That suggests, as I suppose I do not need to point out, the idea not only of communion, which the former phrase brought to our minds, but that of the inspection of our conduct. As ever in the great Taskmaster's eye, says the stern Puritan poet, and although one may object to that word Taskmaster, yet the idea conveyed is the correct expansion of the commandment given to Abraham. Observe how walk before Me is dovetailed, as it were, between the revelation I am the Almighty God and the injunction Be thou perfect. The realisation of that presence of the Almighty which is implied in the expression Walk before Me, the assurance that we are in His sight, will lead straight to the fulfilment of the injunction that bears upon the moral conduct. The same connection of thought underlies Peter's injunction, Like as He ...is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation, followed immediately as it is by, If ye call on Him as Father, who without respect of persons judgeth--as a present estimate--according to every mail's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear--that reverential awe which will lead you to be holy even as I am holy.

This thought that we are in that divine presence, and that there is silently, but most really, a divine opinion being formed of us, consolidated, as it were, moment by moment through our lives, is only tolerable if we have been walking with God. If we are sure, by the power of our communion with Him, of His loving heart as well as of His righteous judgment, then we can spread ourselves out before Him, as a woman will lay out her webs of cloth on the green grass for the sun to blaze down upon them, and bleach the ingrained filth out of them. We must first walk with God before the consciousness that we are walking before Him becomes one that we can entertain and not go mad. When we are sure of the with we can bear the before.

Did you ever see how on a review day, as each successive battalion and company nears the saluting-point where the General inspecting sits, they straighten themselves up and dress their ranks, and pull themselves together as they pass beneath his critical eye. A master's eye makes diligent servants. If we, in the strength of God, would only realise, day by day and act by act of our lives, that we are before Him, what a revolution could be effected on our characters and what a transformation on all our conduct!

Walk before Me and you will be perfect. For the Hebrew words on which I am now commenting may be read, in accordance with the usage of the language, as being not only a commandment but a promise, or, rather, not as two commandments, but a commandment with an appended promise, and so as equivalent to If you will walk before Me you will be perfect. And if we realise that we are under the pure eyes and perfect judgment of God, we shall thereby be strongly urged and mightily helped to be perfect as He is perfect.

**III. Lastly, take the other relation, which is suggested by the third of my texts, where Israel as a whole is commanded to walk after the Lord their God.**

In harmony with the very frequent expression of the Old Testament about going after idols so Israel here is to go after God. What does that mean? Communion, the consciousness of being judged by God, will lead on to aspiration and loving, longing effort to get nearer and nearer to Him. My soul followeth hard after Thee, said the Psalmist, Thy right hand upholdeth me. That element of yearning aspiration, of eager desire to be closer and closer, and liker and liker, to God must be in all true religion. And unless we have it in some measure, it is useless to talk about being Christian people. To press onwards, not as though we had already attained, but following after, if that we may apprehend that for which also we are apprehended, is the attitude of every true follower of Christ. The very crown of the excellence of the Christian life is that it never can reach its goal, and therefore an immortal youth of aspiration and growth is guaranteed to it. Christian people, are you following after God? Are you any nearer to Him than you were ten years ago? Walk with Me, walk before Me, walk after Me.

I need not do more than remind you of another meaning involved in this same expression. If I walk after God, then I let Him go before me and show me my road. Do you remember how, when the ark was to cross Jordan, the commandment was given to the Israelites to let it go well on in front, so that there should be no mistake about the course, for ye have not passed this way heretofore. Do not be in too great a hurry to press upon the heels of God, if I may so say. Do not let your decisions outrun His providence. Keep back the impatience that would hurry on, and wait for His ripening purposes to ripen and His counsels to develop themselves. Walk after God, and be sure you do not go in front of your Guide, or you will lose both your way and your Guide.

I need not say more than a word about the highest aspect which this third of our commandments takes, His sheep follow Him--leaving us an example that we should follow in His steps, that is the culmination of the walking with, and before, and after God which these Old Testament saints were partially practising. All is gathered into the one great word, He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk even as He walked.