

# Walking in the ways of God

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**I**N PSALM 81 we find that David is inspired to recall the necessity to praise God, and to record that He Who had delivered them from the fleshpots of Egypt was not pleased with them because of disobedience: "I am the LORD thy God, Which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it. But My people would not hearken to My voice; and Israel would none of Me. So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels. Oh that My people had hearkened unto Me, and Israel had *walked* in My ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned My hand against their adversaries" (vv. 10-14). In the next psalm God is reproving the judges for their negligence, and because of this declares: "They know not, neither will they understand; they *walk* on in darkness" (82:5).

When we consider these verses, and the emphasis that God has made plain through the writers of His Word regarding the metaphorical walk towards His Kingdom, we realise that we too can bring the wrath of God upon our heads if we walk in our own counsel. Hence the appeal by way of exhortation: "Oh that My people had hearkened unto Me, and Israel had *walked* in My ways!".

## Walking with God

Occasionally we are reminded of the fact that some have been journeying towards the Kingdom for a long time whilst others have only just begun to tread the way of those who are classed as strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Our walk towards the Kingdom began on the day that we were baptized, and the reading of Paul's letter to the Romans showed us the way: "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should *walk* in newness of life" (6:4). Israel was rebuked because, being enticed by the lust of their hearts, they walked in their own counsels. This brought forth sin, and they were therefore subjected to the severity of God for disobedience.

God has always extended an arm towards man, in just the same way as a father extends an arm towards a child, in an invitation to walk with Him. Those who would have none of Him

have been allowed to walk in their own counsels, and so we get the metaphor of walking towards the Kingdom in the light of the gospel. Those who do not take heed of the invitation to walk with God are therefore regarded as walking in darkness.

In Genesis we are told that Enoch walked with God (5:24), and in the letter to the Hebrews we learn that "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God" (11:5). We read that "Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah *walked* with God" (Gen. 6:9). The result of walking with God is clearly portrayed for us in these two simple references. Enoch was translated that he should not see death, and Noah and his family were the only people who were saved when the population of the earth was destroyed.

We read of Abraham as follows: "And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; *walk* before Me, and be thou perfect. And I will make My covenant between Me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly" (17:1,2). The invitation that was given to Abraham was accepted. He walked with God, and, as a result of the faith that he showed in becoming a stranger and a pilgrim who was journeying to a land of promise, he became the father of all those who were prepared to walk with God towards the city whose builder and maker is the One Who had translated Enoch and sealed Noah in the Ark.

## Walking in God's ways

The Psalms begin with a reference to the way in which one should walk, for we read: "Blessed is the man that *walketh not* in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful" (1:1). "Blessed is every one", says the psalmist, "that feareth the LORD; that *walketh* in His ways" (128:1).

In reproving the Israelites for not presenting acceptable sacrifices, God, through the mouth of Micah says: "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to *walk*

humbly with thy God?"; or, to put it in the words of the AV margin, "humble thyself to *walk* with thy God" (6:8). God has always offered the invitation to man to walk with Him, and if that invitation is rejected because of pride, or, to put it the other way round, because man cannot humble himself, then the offer of salvation which is promised to those who continue to walk in newness of life is also rejected and man has no pre-eminence over the beasts that perish.

The children of Israel were given the Law so that they would walk in newness of life, and, when Moses had received all the commandments with the instruction to teach these to all the generation of the children of God, there came the exhortation to obedience in the following words: "Ye shall observe to do therefore as the LORD your God hath commanded you: ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. Ye shall *walk* in all the ways which the LORD your God hath commanded you, that ye may live, and that it may be well with you, and that ye may prolong your days in the land which ye shall possess" (Deut. 5:32,33).

The conclusions to be drawn from a consideration of this walk towards the Kingdom of God, then, are as follows:

- it is the result of an invitation to walk with God in humility
- the man who walks with God must strive to be perfect
- this continual walking in newness of life has the promise of salvation
- to walk with God means walking in the light as compared with walking in the eternal darkness of those that perish
- walking in the ways of God means following the straight and narrow path, not turning to the right hand or to the left; consequently, because the ways of God are higher than our ways, it means that there is a constant appeal not to walk in the counsel of the ungodly
- the man who walks with God walks in the ways of God, in the light of the gospel, and is the recipient of manifold blessings because, in just the same way that God has chosen the children of Israel for His particular treasure, He has also chosen us to be His sons and daughters.

### **Walking together**

God said to those about to enter the promised land: "The LORD shall establish thee an holy people unto Himself, as He hath sworn unto

thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, and *walk* in His ways. And all people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the LORD; and they shall be afraid of thee" (Deut. 28:9,10).

This appeal by God to walk in His ways has been repeated all down the ages. Joshua reminded those who had entered into the promised rest to "love the LORD [their] God, and to *walk* in all His ways, and to keep His commandments, and to cleave unto Him, and to serve Him with all [their] heart and with all [their] soul" (Josh. 22:5). In the prayer that Solomon uttered at the dedication of the temple he said: "When heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against Thee; if they pray toward this place, and confess Thy name, and turn from their sin, when Thou afflictest them: then hear Thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of Thy servants, and of Thy people Israel, that Thou teach them the good way wherein they should *walk*, and give rain upon Thy land, which Thou hast given to Thy people for an inheritance" (1 Kgs. 8:35,36).

If we have faith in God then we are in the same relationship as children to a father. We have confidence that if God is leading us by the hand then we have nothing to fear: "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I *walk* through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me" (Ps. 23:3,4).

God asked the question through the prophet Amos: "Can two *walk* together, except they be agreed?" (3:3). When two walk together we all know from personal experience that it is impossible to do this unless both are agreed on the pace that is to be set and the direction in which they will walk. Both become thoughtful regarding the path which lies before them, and each is ready to anticipate any move on the part of the other. Consequently, when two are agreed, a walk together becomes a pleasure. If an attempt is made to walk together when there is not complete agreement then the journey becomes unpleasant and in some cases unbearable.

When we liken our pilgrimage, therefore, to walking in newness of life it becomes even more important to realise the necessity for agreement, because, if it is impossible for two to walk together unless they be agreed, how can an ecclesia of many pilgrims walk in the ways of God unless they are all agreed?

If we choose our own counsels and take no regard for walking in the ways of God then obviously this disrupts the whole company, and, whereas the soldiers of Christ should be in disciplined order, breaks in the ranks are bound to occur. This gives occasion for the enemy to penetrate the armour that otherwise cannot be pierced when a united front is present.

The people of the world are running to and fro, not knowing in which direction to go. They are likened to those who are tossed about with every wind of doctrine. The pilgrims who walk in the ways of God are united in the decision to walk together towards the city whose builder and maker is God. Consequently they have a regard for their actions, realising that they are no longer in a position where they can please themselves.

When two walk together they are agreed, and if pilgrims are walking in the ways of God then they must be agreed that all the commandments of God apply to each and every one. For two to be agreed, however, it often means that it is not simply a case of not breaking the rules, but rather of interpreting the spirit of the rules, which are simply there for a guide.

Paul has this very much in mind when writing to the Philippians, for he writes:

“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us *walk* by the same rule, let us mind the same thing. Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which *walk* so as ye have us for an ensample. (For many *walk*, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.) For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (3:13-21).

Was it not Jesus himself who said that a house divided against itself cannot stand? Did he not also say:

“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift” (Mt. 5:21-24)?

Can two walk together except they be agreed?

### Walking in light

We have already referred to the necessity of walking in newness of life, which involves walking in the light of the gospel. In writing to the Romans Paul reminds them that “The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us *walk* honestly [or decently], as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (13:12-14).

In appealing to the children of Israel to walk in His ways, God gave them an assurance that “all people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the LORD” (Deut. 28:10). We have this same assurance, and consequently, as we walk together towards the promised rest, the people of the earth should, by our walking in newness of life, by our solidarity, by our outward display of unification of purpose, be able to distinguish us as being a people called out, separated and sanctified, a people who are in complete agreement, a people who are recognised as having been with Jesus.

If we are not recognisable as such then we are not walking in the ways of God, we are walking in the ways of the ungodly. Peter reminds us of what our conduct should be towards the Gentiles when he says:

“Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; having your conversa-

tion honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: as free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king . . . Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing" (1 Pet. 2:11-3:9).

Paul, in similar vein, wrote: "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another" (Rom. 12:10).

Where does our affection lie? In the First Epistle of John we read: "Love not the world . . . For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (2:15-17). If the world sees that we prefer the things of the world to the love of the Brotherhood, then obviously they can only conclude that we are a people who are no different from them, and consequently God is not glorified in their sight. "All people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the LORD".

Are we denying the name of the Lord before the people of the earth by deserting the ranks of those who are endeavouring to walk in newness of life towards the mark for the high calling of God in Christ Jesus? Peter denied Jesus by word of mouth, and later went out and wept bitterly. We can deny both the Father and the Son simply by our actions, either towards one another or towards those who watch us.

### **Walking in unity**

The spirit of unity with the will of God that was manifested in His Son Jesus is something for which each of us as individuals should strive. If, however, we love the Brotherhood in the same

spirit of unity then we will be preparing the ecclesia for the day when the marriage of the bride takes place, for then will all things be in perfect unity.

This spirit of unity, then, is vital. "Can two walk together except they be agreed?". When Jesus prayed to his Father in heaven he said: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me. And the glory which Thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and Thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved me" (Jno. 17:20-23).

Can we ignore this appeal for unity? How can the world recognise us as brethren of Christ if we do not manifest the spirit of brotherly love, if we do not let the world see that we are united, of one mind, walking together in agreement, walking in the ways of God? "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children", said Paul to the Ephesians; "and *walk* in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour" (5:1,2). The choice is ours, but if God has seen fit continually to remind us throughout His Word that we should walk in His ways and not in our own counsels then we should, in view of the fact that we are supposed to be a company of pilgrims and strangers who are walking along the straight and narrow path, be ever mindful of the impression that our brethren and sisters obtain as a result of our actions, and the impression that the people of the world receive regarding this sect which is supposed to be different.

In the First Epistle of John we read:

"that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and *walk* in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we *walk* in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus

Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1:3-7).

Isaiah was given a glimpse of the Kingdom of God and the blessings that would be introduced at its inauguration when he was inspired to write:

“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing; for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes. And an highway shall be there, and a way,

and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there: and the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (35:5-10).

If we keep these thoughts in mind, and walk in newness of life, then we shall be walking in the way of holiness, and it will no longer be necessary to ask: “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?”.



## Reviews

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# Standing against military service\*

John Nicholls

WITH THE STORM clouds of war looming once again over the Middle East, and the threat of terrorist attacks upon nations worldwide, it is both timely and faithful that the Christadelphian Military Service Committee has published a book about the Brotherhood’s position on conscientious objection to military service.

Jesus told his disciples that, among many signs of his return, there would be “distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken” (Lk. 21:25,26). The reaction of the powers that be to the present troubles is to strengthen the armed forces, the police, and security in general. President Bush has “declared war on terror”, and most of the world’s nations agree with the need to do this, although not necessarily with the means he proposes to use. But Jesus said to true disciples: “look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh” (v. 28).

As we wait in these troubled times for the coming of our Lord, Brother Botten’s book comes

as a service to our Brotherhood. It will strengthen the faith of an older generation who lived through the problems of being conscientious objectors in World War 2. It will remind a middle-aged generation of the principles of our separation from the world in the matter of taking up arms and defending the country of our natural birth. And it is an appropriate book for a younger generation, who will need, in faith, to make a stand should conscription again be introduced by the troubled nations in which they live.

The reviewer feels that for this latter group the book is particularly suitable. It is not a very lengthy book, but it is well written and illustrated, and many interesting documents and letters are included in the text. It is logically set out, and takes a comprehensive approach to the subject. It could profitably be given to people

\* *The Captive Conscience*, John Botten, available from The Christadelphian, 404 Shaftmoor Lane, Birmingham, B28 8SZ; tel. 0121-777-6328; e-mail orders@thechristadelphian.com. Price including postage for a single copy £6.40, multiple orders will be invoiced.