

Two Levels of the Christian Walk

Taken as Chapter 12 from Andrew Murray's book entitled Revival.

In more than one chapter I have spoken of the two levels of the Christian walk, and the necessity of our living on the higher, which is simply the true Christian life. If we are to have victory over our failures and enter upon that path, we can become faithful and strong in prayer. The question is often asked whether and where these two stages are to be found in Scripture. I believe an insight into this to be of such importance that I will try to give as simple and clear an answer as possible.

Everywhere in Scripture you will find God speaking of these two levels. The difference can be seen simply in that which we see around us--between a healthy and a sick man. Both are living men, with all the attributes that make up a man. But the one is able to fulfill his duty as a man, and to do so joyfully and successfully; while the other, because he is not well and lacks the needed strength, finds the performance of duty a burden, if not an impossibility.

Scripture divides Christians into carnal and spiritual—those who remain babes when they ought to be men, and those who have gone on unto perfection or maturity; those who walk after the flesh and those who walk after the Spirit; those who live under the law and its bondage and those who live as under grace, and the liberty and joy it gives. These illustrate the two possible states of a believer—living either a feeble, sickly life, or a healthy, vigorous one. Once we see this, every command to live up to the privileges of our state, every promise about the full salvation that the Holy Spirit can work, every warning about yielding to self and the flesh becomes a call to us to decide which of the two types of living shall be ours.

All teaching in the Epistles is founded on the solemn thought of a Christian having the opportunity and power to decide whether he will live after the flesh or after the Spirit; whether he will live a half-hearted, half-worldly life, or yield himself wholly to be led by the Spirit. In the Epistle to the Galatians, for instance, Paul does not only call Christians to abstain from sin, both in its grosser form and in what are considered its lesser and more pardonable, almost inevitable manifestations—anger, envy, strife—but he seeks to bring home to them that their sins are the works of an evil power, the flesh, and are proof that they are under its rule. He does not only teach them to seek love and joy and gentleness and temperance, but he also points out that these are the fruit of the Spirit; therefore, everything depends upon their knowing under which law they are living—that of the flesh or of the Spirit. A man may be striving most earnestly to conquer certain sins, but until the axe is laid to the root of the tree, and he sees that he must be brought out from under the power of the flesh unto the liberty of the Spirit, his efforts will be comparatively vain.

In this light, let us consider the teaching of Scripture. Take a command like that of our Lord: "Abide in me, and I in you." Does not the very need of such an injunction prove that a man may be in Christ, and yet, through ignorance or sloth or unbelief, fail of that purposeful conscious abiding that brings forth much fruit and has power in prayer? Christ's command at once draws a dividing line. Those who in faith surrender their whole being to let Him work in them all He desires occupy an entirely different platform from those who are not quite ready to forsake all and follow fully. These latter do not fail of salvation, but only the former have the spiritual capacity to prove fully the power of the prayer promises.

Or take the teaching of Paul in Romans 6: "How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? . . . Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. . . . Yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead." Does not the teaching at once suggest that there might have been Christians at Rome who were ignorant of these truths, and as a consequence, could not be living in the experience of their power? Is it not true that many Christians regard this epistle up to the fifth chapter, with its truths of justification, as the key of the gospel, while they look on chapter 6 as beyond their reach both in thought and experience? And does it not follow that a believer who has by the Holy Spirit's power yielded himself as dead to sin and alive to God must have a secret power of victory over sin which the other cannot have?

The words that follow, in verses 14 and 15, bring this out more clearly. "Shall we sin. . . ?" This is the great question of the chapter. "Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace?" The very question shows that a believer may misunderstand the meaning of what grace is and does. He may think of grace chiefly as pardon; he may not know that grace is able and ready to work in him all he needs for obedience or holiness. Such a defective view must hinder his spiritual life. Because he does not know and prove the fullness of grace, he naturally acts under the law and its bondage. It cannot be otherwise. There are only these two powers, law and grace. Whatever in my being is not under the actual and active reign of grace working in me is under the power of law with its ceaseless appeal to self-effort. Is it not evident here that there must be two entirely distinct modes of Christian living? And until the believer is brought out entirely from under the law and led to see that there is a life in which grace works everything, moment by moment, he cannot live the healthy vigorous life of the man who practically knows the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

Just one more illustration. Take from Romans 8 or Galatians 5 an expression like "led by the Spirit," "walk in the Spirit." Many Christians will confess that they have but a vague idea of the work of the Holy Spirit in them. They do not know that He is the Spirit of grace, the Spirit through whose presence and energy in them, moment by moment, the work of grace can be maintained for every possible need of their spiritual life. They do not know that by faith they may realize His presence continually, and so in everything live a life yielded to Him personally for guidance and strength. Is it not plain that a believer to whom all this has been brought home as a matter of living faith and experience must be living on an entirely different level from him who is struggling in his own strength, all the while he asks God to help him?

Listen to these words: "Walk by the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. . . . If ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. . . . If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." Do they not all clearly indicate that there is a spiritual life in which many of the Galatians were not living, and to which Paul was calling them? To be under the law, to walk after the flesh—that is, in our own strength—even in religious things, so as to make a fair show in the flesh, is a state of failure. But to have crucified the flesh, to walk by the Spirit, and to be filled with the fruit of the Spirit is the true life to which we are called. That life is truly possible and most blessed.

My Christian friend, I cannot but think that if you will carefully consider these passages, you will see what abundant reason there is for speaking of the two stages in the Christian life. And then you will realize how important it is to declare the fact, and also confess in which of these two levels you are living. As long as people refuse to do this, their hurt will not be healed. They will ever be trying to deal with individual sins, not knowing that their continual failure is a result of something radically wrong. They are still struggling in their own strength; they have not yet entered upon the life of simple and entire trust in Christ to work all in them by His Holy Spirit.

Even if these people admit that the one level of experience is defective in many ways, they will still strive to be more faithful. They will watch against that accursed self that leads them away. They will seek to trust and pray more earnestly for promised grace. Eventually they hope to grow out of it into something better. They forget that physically we can grow out of feebleness into strength, but that sick men need the medicine or the knife of the physician. It is only as we fully accept the teaching of God's Word in regard to the two ways of life open to the Christian that we will see the possibility of an entire transition from one to the other-- and that it can happen in a single moment.

Here is another great difficulty with many. They cannot understand how a single step can affect such a change. May the Lord help me to make it plain.

Suppose someone at Rome had been reading one of the texts d we have quoted, "Ye are not under the law, but under grace, and had suddenly realized that he had never fully known what grace was, but had been living in bondage under the law. What ought he to have done? Suppose he had met Paul later and had asked him what he should do. Would not the answer have been: At once, this very moment, yield to grace, and trust it to do its work in you?

Paul writes: "Therefore it is of grace that it may be by faith." And whatever is to be believed, because it is true, is to be believed at once.

Perhaps the message has come to you that the oft-repeated failure in your prayer life and the feeling of hopelessness regarding any great change in it being possible may be because you have sought, under the law, to fulfill God's demands in your own strength, not having known the joy of the Holy Spirit as your strength. I pray you, beware of now resolving not to look to your own strength anymore, but to pray and trust more. Dealing with certain symptoms of disease without touching the root of the evil will heal your hurt

only slightly. Be not ashamed of confessing that your life, as a whole, has been on the wrong level; that it needs entire reconstruction; that it is only the almighty power of Christ that can bring you into the faith where your walk will be by faith alone. The deeper your sense and the fuller your admission of the wrongness of your present state, notwithstanding all God has done for you and in you, the clearer will be your conviction that nothing but the work of God can put you right and the bolder your faith to claim it from Him at once.

To take another illustration from the Galatians. Suppose one of the believers had said to Paul, "I confess that though I have believed in Christ, I have been walking after the flesh and living under the law. How am I to come from under it, and live as one who walks in the Spirit and is led by the Spirit?" Would not the answer be clear and decisive, "Have I not written you (3:14), 'We receive the promise of the Spirit by faith'?" Will you not at once confess and forsake the folly of having sought anything in yourself or the law, and believe that this life in the leading of the Holy Spirit is yours? We need no other answer. When once we yield to the Holy Spirit's conviction of the sin of unbelief in not having trusted Christ, His grace and His Spirit, to do all in us as the only possible cause of failure, every difficulty will disappear. We shall then joyfully accept the message that our only hope is in the immediate surrender to Christ to do all the work in us, because we now see that He will do it all.

Let us now turn to our text and consider the contrast, the warning, the example, the promise.

The contrast points to those who were not the true circumcision, Christians who did not know what it was to have no confidence in the flesh. The warning comes to us to fear and beware lest our Christian life, with all its zeal and all we have known of grace, may be suffering from the same disease. Let us not think of the Judaizing party in the early church. Legality is the religion of human nature, the very last thing the flesh will give up, and from which nothing but the full life of the Spirit can free us. The example is bright and clear. Paul says of himself and his friends, those like-minded with himself whom he later calls the perfect (Phil. 3 :15), the mature. "We are the circumcision" (our hearts circumcised by the Lord our God in the putting off of the body of the flesh), which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." There is a life possible—we see it here—in which we are made free from all secret trust in the flesh; in which we wholly live in the Spirit and dare to say we worship God in the Spirit; in which we only and ever rejoice in Christ Jesus as our life and our strength. That example, that personal witness to what God can do, is a promise. It gives us the divine assurance that what God did for Paul and his brethren, He can do for us. He asks nothing less of us. He will give it to us.

The steps by which anyone can enter this life are simple and clear. There must be conviction and confession. If there be the least sense in our heart that our life has been more in the flesh than the Spirit, let us cherish that conviction. Let us give way to it that the Holy Spirit may fully show us the evil of it as sin against God's grace. Let us not shrink from definitely confessing it before God. With all our experiences of grace in the

past, let us be willing to confess this root of evil, and in confession throw it upon God to remove.

Then comes surrender and consecration. Surrender—the giving up of everything that is of sin or self into the death of the cross, so that with the old man crucified, the flesh and its lusts crucified, we may forsake all to follow Christ. For this we have no power—we hardly understand the words—but God, who led Christ through the cross to the resurrection. God will make us partakers of that death. Let us surrender ourselves to it and to Him. He alone can, He surely will, make Christ live in us. Consecration will follow—the willing sacrifice of the whole being to be holy to God and possessed by Him. Just as the temple was holy to Him and wholly devoted to His service alone, or as a sacrifice on the altar was holy, and wholly consumed to His glory.

Faith and rest are then the last steps. Faith in God, who does all. Faith in Christ, who gives the strength for the surrender and undertakes to maintain it. Faith in the Holy Spirit as given to be ours in His fullness, as now accepted and received by us, as flowing forth without ceasing from the living Lord to be each moment the breath and life of our life. And then rest, apart from light or feeling, in the confident assurance that the three-yet-one God will do all in us.

The other steps are all subordinate. Faith is the one decisive step, in which the soul passes out of the life partly in the Spirit and partly in the flesh, and enters, in God's name and strength, upon a life and walk in the Spirit.

Will you not, my reader, join the company that by the grace of God say, "We are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh"? Kneel down and speak these words in faith.

Dare to trust God that He enables you to live this life.