

St. Paul, the Model Christian.

by Daniel Steele

St. Paul's life is a model for Christians to follow, characterized by selflessness, singleness of eye, and perfect self-abnegation for the salvation of his fellow men and for the glory of God.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 4:16, 1 Corinthians 11:1, 2 Corinthians 4:2, Philippians 3:14, Philippians 4:9, 1 Thessalonians 2:10
Topics: "Christian Living", "Sanctification"

Description

Daniel Steele preaches about the importance of living a straight and upright Christian life, contrasting the crooked paths of sin and repentance with the straight path of righteousness exemplified by St. Paul. He emphasizes the need for believers to imitate Paul's example of moral character and self-conquest, following the straight line towards the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Steele highlights Paul's conscious pursuit of holiness and his unwavering commitment to living a blameless life, urging Christians to imitate him as he imitates Christ.

Transcript

The confession is painfully common in many of the churches, "I make many crooked paths." But we look in vain for anything like this in the frequent allusions of St. Paul to his own personal experience. He never intimates that his Christian course was a zigzag of sinning and repenting. The seventh chapter of Romans may be a photograph of the unregenerate Saul, while a devout Pharisee, endeavoring to realize in his own life his high ethical ideals without the aid of divine grace, and perpetually failing because of the domination of the flesh, or depraved inclination, not yet conquered by the new birth. It was never a portrait of Paul, the saint, regenerated by the Holy Ghost.

If you wish to see this latter portrait you will find it in Phil. 3:14, R. V., "I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." There is no crooked path here. For a racer with his eyes fixed upon the prize in the umpire's extended hand, practically demonstrates the geometrical theorem that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. He "presses on," turning neither to the right nor to the left to gratify curiosity or appetite. The old crooked self which clamored for indulgence, which sowed not to the spirit, has been crucified (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20, and 6:14), and the new self bears the image of him who never deviated a hair's breadth from a straight line in all his earthly life.

St. Paul's rectitude, or straightness of moral character, is involved in his repeated exhortation in the form of a command, to imitate his own example. never qualifying it by any such weakening limitation as "so far as I follow Christ." Let us study the proof-texts. Immediately after the above-quoted text implying Paul's

straightforwardness as a racer, in verse 14, -- a perfect racer as in verse 15 -- he says in verse 17, "Be ye imitators together of me." -- R. V. He then intimates that there were at Philippi successful copyists of his own example, which was in turn a reproduction of that of Christ. "Mark them which so walk as ye have us [me] for an example." He then tearfully declares that many were making very crooked paths, alluding not to those outside of the church, but to "many" professors of faith in our adorable Savior, whose sensual lives evinced that they were enemies of the cross of Christ, the symbol of the highest self-sacrifice. They did not imitate the purity and self-conquest of the great apostle, the founder of their church, amid tumult, imprisonment, and stripes (Acts 16:23). If in those days, when persecution is supposed greatly to have winnowed the church, Paul found many names on the communion roll whose sensuality was a god, rivaling the sinless Jesus, and wringing tears from the eyes of the pastor who had once rejoiced over their espousals to Christ, how abundant would be his weeping were he in pastoral contact with many pleasure-loving members of our modern churches!

In Phil. 4:9 Paul says with mandatory authority, "The things which you have both learned and received and heard and seen in me, these things do." What they learned and received related to Christian doctrine, but what they heard and saw in Paul involved his personal conduct and character. They heard his conversation, the index of the inner life; for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. They saw his manner of life, and they are required to fashion theirs after the model of his own. St. Paul could not have given such a precept if he had been conscious of a blemished life, of trifling or impatient words and of acts showing the serpent-trail of sin. It is a moral impossibility except upon the hypothesis of studied hypocrisy.

The same command is reiterated with the added intensity of entreaty in 1 Cor. 4:16, "I beseech you, therefore, be ye imitators of me," your spiritual father. The loving father, who is conscious of "making crooked paths," beseeches his boy not to follow his example. If the father burns incense to the vile god, tobacco, he usually entreats his son not to bend the knee to that polluting idol. The inference is irresistible that St. Paul was conscious of both inward and outward holiness.

1 Cor. 11:1. The chapter division at the close of 1 Cor. 10 is very unfortunate, since it separates the exhortation from the preceding argument. The R. V. puts that exhortation, "Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ," in the paragraph where it belongs. This shows in what particulars Paul wishes the Corinthians to imitate him; namely, (1) in not seeking his own profit of ease, or fame, or gain, but only the salvation of the many. This is the disposition which Christ manifested, as described by Paul in that sublime passage found in Phil. 2:3-11, discussed by theologians as involving the doctrine of the "kenosis," the Son of God emptying himself. (2) We do not strain the text if we also make it include the imitation of the great apostle's singleness of eye in doing all things to the glory of God, and of giving "offence to neither the Jews, nor to the Gentiles. nor to the church of God." This life of perfect self-abnegation for the salvation of his fellow men and for the glory of God, is at once the characteristic and proof of perfected holiness.

In 2 Cor. 4:2 there is an unmistakable confession of this grace, not in set phrase, but in terms which necessarily imply it. "We have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, commending ourselves [myself] to every man's conscience in the sight of God." Here is a twofold appeal in proof of Paul's rectitude of life, the human conscience, and the eye of the Omniscient, who sees through all disguises as in the splendors of noon. Another and more striking double appeal of the same kind is found in 1 Thess. 2:10, "Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblamably we behaved ourselves," etc. The three adverbs express the three aspects of his character as viewed by God, by men, and by his own conscience. The Son of man excepted, no

man in the Holy Scriptures professes moral and spiritual perfection in terms as strong as these. For both God and man are called to attest it. Hence, it must be an inward reality, and not a mere outward seeming.

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