

Steadfastness of Character

by Duncan Campbell

The sermon emphasizes the importance of steadfastness and Christian character, and calls us to a life of self-renunciation, holy living, and prophetic anointing.

Scripture: Genesis 17:1, Psalm 139:23-24, Proverbs 24:21, Matthew 5:48, Luke 9:23, John 16:8, Romans 14:7, Philippians 2:15, 1 Thessalonians 5:21, Hebrews 13:9

Topics: "Christian Character", "Steadfastness"

Description

Duncan Campbell emphasizes the importance of steadfastness of character in the Christian life, urging believers to resist the temptation of change and to hold fast to their convictions. He references Proverbs 24:21 and highlights the need for Christians to be blameless and harmless, as stated in Philippians 2:15, while also calling for a sacrificial commitment to follow Christ. Campbell warns against the superficiality of contemporary evangelism and the dangers of conforming to worldly standards, advocating for a life that reflects the authority and anointing of God. He encourages believers to seek a deeper relationship with God, which empowers them to live out their faith authentically and impactfully. Ultimately, he calls for a return to a sense of urgency and the fear of God in the pursuit of holiness and effective witness.

Transcript

"My son, fear thou the Lord and the king: and meddle not with them that are given to change" (Proverbs 24:21).

In the reference given above we read of those who are given to change. That is the opposite of STEADFASTNESS, which is, without question, a prime virtue.

Someone has said: "Be sure you are right, and then hold on though the heavens fall." That, I think, is the truth suggested in this passage of Scripture. We must not always be wavering, always unsettled, always changing. A time must come when we must be settled in our minds. St. Paul says: "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21). I believe it is due to our failure to follow Paul's advice here that we so often allow things which may appear to be quite legitimate in themselves, to divert us from what ought to be the supreme purpose of our life. In the Epistle to the Hebrews there is an arresting word: "Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines, For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace (Heb. 13:9).

In the first place we have STEADFASTNESS OF CHARACTER. Now we might ask ourselves what are the outstanding characteristics of a God-honoring Christian character? Paul gives the answer to the question in his letter to the Philippians: "That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world" (Phil. 2.15). Note the words 'without rebuke'. We naturally ask, is it really possible to attain to that standard of Christian character? I do not think Paul would make such a statement or demand, were it not possible.

"Walk before Me, and be thou perfect" was the standard God asked of Abram (Gen. 17.1), and no less demanding are the words of Christ: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5.48). This is the New Testament standard, and we dare not put it lightly aside. It was the Master Himself who said: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9.23). From this we learn that the Cross that called Jesus to a sacrificial death now calls His disciples to a sacrificial life. One of the Puritans set this in clear light: "He is unworthy of his master 's service that is ashamed to wear his livery, and follow him in the Street with it on his back." And yet this is the stand that we are called upon to take, especially in view of the lowering of standards and the compromising tendency of our day. Is this a characteristic of the average Christian worker, the average evangelist? The man who, because of his conviction, refuses to lower his standard to worldly conformity, but rather chooses to suffer affliction with the people of God, is becoming increasingly rare. "The test of a man's religious life and character is not what he does in the exceptional moments of life, but how he reacts when made to face the implications of the Cross." (Oswald Chambers)

The late Dr. A. W. Tozer has a striking word to say about the contemporary approach in the field of evangelism: "The Cross of popular evangelism is not the Cross of the New Testament. It is rather a new, bright ornament upon the bosom of self-assured and carnal Christianity: its hands are indeed the hands of Esau, but its voice is the voice of Jacob. The old Cross slew men, the new Cross entertains them; the old Cross condemns, the new Cross amuses; the old Cross destroyed confidence in the flesh, the new Cross encourages it; the old Cross brought tears, the new Cross brings laughter."

I love to think of that picture historians have given us of Garibaldi standing on the steps of St. Peter's in Rome. To the men gathered around him he said: "I offer you neither pay nor provision; I offer you hunger, thirst, forced marches, battles and death: let him who loves his country with his heart and not with his lips only, follow me." Dare we offer anything less to our Leader? I have already referred to the call of the Cross to the early disciples. They responded, and went forth to proclaim with personal, passionate conviction that self-renunciation is the cardinal ethic of the Christian life. This is a truth that needs to be emphasized these days when we are being offered a Christianity that winks at separation, but at the same time glorifies self-realization. Here let me quote from James Chalmers of the South Sea Islands: "The life of holiness is not ease, but encounter; not song, but strife; not ecstasy, but energy; not calmness, but conquest." This is the life to which we are called, and to which we must respond if we are to be witnesses worthy of our Master in our day and generation.

I believe there is a sense in which we, as Christian workers, are greater than our message. How many are prepared to accept that! "As he who hath builded the house hath more honor than the house" (Heb. 3.3). This verse, of course, has reference to the creative energy of God, yet it has another application. What was the object of Christ's mission to the world, when emptying Himself of His glory, He tabernacled among men? Was it not to reproduce in His people His own moral image and life? This can be summarized in Paul's words: "That the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh" (2 Cor. 4.11). To the Philippians Paul uttered what must have been one of the most daring things ever uttered by man: "So now

also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death" (Phil. 1.20).

There is a kind of gospel being proclaimed today which conveniently accommodates itself to the spirit of the age, and makes no demand for godliness. To quote A. W. Tozer again: "The curse of superficiality is upon us." We must guard ourselves lest we imbibe this spirit. Live to the world's conscience, but avoid its taste, is a wise maxim.

I wonder what Christ meant when He addressed His disciples in the words: "Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods?" (John 10. These are solemn words which fell from the lips of the Master. What did He mean? Did He mean that we hold the destiny of others in our hands -- that in a certain sense we determine their destiny? "For none of us liveth to himself" (Rom. 14.7).

In this connection we are not thinking of what we do or say, but of what we are. You have heard it said that we must never draw people to ourselves. Of course, there is a sense in which that is true, but there is also a sense in which it is not true! I would illustrate this from what is written concerning John the Baptist when he cried: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1.29). "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3.30). To whom did the Baptist utter these words? To the people that were drawn to him in the wilderness! There was something about this man, something about his personality, something about his mode of living that drew the crowds to the wilderness. Let us recall the questions Jesus asked relative to John: "What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? . . . But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet" (Matt. 11.7-9). "A reed shaken by the wind? A reed would never attract people, because it is just one of the ordinary things of God's creation. They went not out to see a reed, nor to see a man clothed in soft raiment -- no! But a prophet! "And I say unto you, more than a prophet." What drew them? What created interest that drew men to a wilderness? Was it the eloquence of the man; was it his mode of living, or was it something other than all that? "What went ye out for to see? A reed shaken with the wind?" I want to suggest that it was that something more that drew the people. Was that something the AUTHORITY OF CHARACTER, something about him that cried: "God is in that life!"?

We sometimes speak of this as 'heaven's anointing' -- something that cannot be explained on the basis of the human, which demonstrates the supernatural power of God. I wonder, as we go forward to proclaim our message, do we go forward as mere reeds, shaken by the wind, or as prophets with a message from God? I have seen the difference between the reed and the prophet demonstrated again and again during the revival in the Hebrides, when the power of God was let loose as heaven's anointing rested on men who knew how to lay hold of God in prayer, or as they bore testimony to His saving power.

"An ill man in a church," said Joseph Hall, once Bishop of Norwich, "is like a shrubby tree in a garden whose shade keeps better plants from growing." May God save us from being 'shrubby trees', or reeds shaken by the wind! In the presence of John the Baptist, men felt themselves instinctively to be in the presence of a moral majesty. There was something about him, and I want to emphasize that something, so that we may take ourselves in hand and ask ourselves, do we know this AUTHORITY that makes all the difference between a dead orthodoxy and the anointed word that brings conviction and a sense of God? This is what the Church needs today, -- men and women who have that something, that anointing that comes from God, as illustrated in the testimony of Dr. A. T. Pierson, as follows:

"For sixteen years I preached the Gospel with all the logic and eloquence I could command, The results were disappointing. An evangelist came to our city, and hundreds were swept into the kingdom. I saw that the secret of his power lay in his possession of the Holy Spirit. After praying that I might receive this power, it came to me on November 15th. In the following sixteen months I made more converts to Christ than I had gained in the previous sixteen years."

There was something about the words of John the Baptist that was missing in the words of the scribes. It was the prophetic anointing. "How true," said Richard Baxter, "that a holy life is a continual pain to sinners, stirring conscience and crying aloud, 'Oh, sinner, change your ways!'" One is suddenly reminded of the words of Christ: "When He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16.8). We should ever ask ourselves as Christian workers: "Is this happening?"

I believe God has a purpose for each one of us, but to attain to it may be no easy task. We must take ourselves in hand, and school ourselves, especially our wills, into a greater fitness for the serious business of living as Christian workers, of being ambassadors of Jesus Christ. There are times when we tend to take things too casually. But can we be casual in the work of God -- casual when the house is on fire, and people in danger of being burned? The analogy pales before the plight of immortal souls!

There is today an awful danger of allowing ourselves to drift in an easy current of conventional Christianity and conventional mission-work. Somehow, we have lost the sense of urgency because we have lost the subduing sense of God -- that sense of God that a past generation spoke of as 'the fear of God'. I know of no greater tragedy than to lose the sense of the immediate presence of God. We are living in a day when, in the field of Christian activity everything seems to be real but God, but it is still true that "the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits" (Dan. 11.32). They shall not attempt to do exploits -- they do them! How much our churches and missions need this quality of Christian character that manifests the power that springs from an indwelling Christ. If our country is just what the churches make it, there is a need for us as Christian workers to take ourselves in hand and face ourselves with unqualified honesty, with the prayer of David on our lips: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139.23, 34).

If we are to know the STEADFASTNESS OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER that is honoring to God, and convincing as to the reality of Christian experience in the midst of men, we would do well to take to heart the testimony of Robert Murray McCheyne, as we have it in the following words: "I am persuaded that I shall obtain the highest amount of personal holiness, I shall do most for God's glory and the good of men, and I shall have the fullest reward in eternity by maintaining a conscience always washed in the blood of Christ, by being filled with the Spirit at all times, and attaining the most entire likeness to Christ in my will and heart that it is possible for a redeemed sinner to attain in this world."

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