

Rev. 14:4. the Model of a Holy Life

by Horatius Bonar

A Christian man is called to live a holy life, following the example of Christ in faith, prayer, hope, holiness, love, and zeal.

Scripture: Zechariah 9:9, Matthew 11:28, John 11:22, Romans 5:9, 1 Corinthians 6:11, 2 Corinthians 10:1, Hebrews 12:1-2, 2 Peter 2:21, 1 John 4:19, Revelation 14:4

Topics: "Holiness", "Imitation of Christ"

Description

Horatius Bonar emphasizes the call to live a holy life by following Christ, the ultimate model of holiness. He explains that believers are redeemed to be holy and are to imitate Christ in faith, prayer, hope, holiness, love, and zeal. Bonar highlights that Christ's meekness and gentleness should inspire both obedience in believers and an invitation to the unbelievers to come to Him. The sermon encourages Christians to reflect Christ's character in their lives, aiming for transformation into His likeness. Ultimately, Bonar reassures that Christ's open invitation is extended to all, regardless of their past.

Transcript

"These are those who follow the Lamb wherever He goes."--Revelation 14:4.

"Follow me!"--John 11:22.

"Leaving us an example, that we should follow His steps."--2 Peter 2:21.

"I Paul myself beseech you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ."--2 Corinthians 10:1.

These four passages point more or less to our responsibility for a holy life--and to Christ as the true model of that life. We are redeemed--that we may be holy. We are freely pardoned--that we may be holy. We look to Jesus--that we may be holy. We are filled with the Spirit--that we may be holy. The true religious life rises out of redemption--and is a copy of Christ's walk on earth. Beholding Him--we are changed into His image, from glory to glory.

The first of these passages refers specially to the future honor of the saints. Their peculiar privilege is to be attendance on the Lamb--'forever with the Lord'; forever beholding His face; forever waiting on Him, sharing His fellowship, doing His will, enjoying His blessedness, when day has broken, and the shadows fled away. They are to be to the Lamb in His exaltation, what the twelve disciples were in His humiliation--'followers'--though in a far higher sense than was known in the days of His flesh. Yet we may

use this verse to point out Christ--as our present leader and example. We follow Him here in suffering and service--as we shall follow Him hereafter in glory and in joy!

Christ was our substitute when He was here on earth--we are His representatives now that He is absent. We are to be 'lights in the world,' as He was. For this end we are to 'follow His steps,' live as He lived, love as He loved, speak as He spoke. He is our pattern and model. Shine as He shone! He was the 'Israelite indeed,' the true Nathanael, in whom was no deceit. He was the true Nazarite. Let us be Nazarites as He was--consecrated to God, and separate from the world. Look up, Christian, look up! Not Babylon; but Jerusalem, is your hope and your home. Thus Peter points to Christ as our 'example,' remembering perhaps His last words to himself, 'Follow me.'

The third of these passages connects together the suffering and the example. In it Peter places both before us at once, that we may have our eye on both, not separating the blood from the holiness, yet keeping both distinct, the former as the fountainhead of the latter. Jesus by His blood 'washes,' 'sanctifies,' 'justifies' (Romans 5:9; 1 Corinthians 6:11). And while doing so, presents Himself as our model--the true doer of the Father's will.

Let us note Peter's words more at length. Christ for us, or Christ our substitute--that is the first thing. Christ in us, or Christ our life--that is the next. Christ before us, or Christ our model--that is the next. These three great truths make up a large portion of Christianity.

We look to Christ for salvation, and we obtain it as surely and simply as Israel obtained healing by looking at the brazen serpent. We look to Christ for conformity to His likeness--and we are changed into His likeness as we gaze upon Him!

The model or pattern is a COMPLETE one. Others models have only one feature of beauty, and are imperfect. Christ is perfect. Every feature is there; every line is there. We are to grow like it; to be imitators of Christ. We are to copy Him. In copying a man, there is danger of producing a stiff, second-hand, second-rate resemblance. Not so in copying Christ. He is the divine model. It is God's purpose and desire that we copy Him. He is gone to heaven, but has left this pattern as a legacy.

A Christian, then, is a copy of Christ. His inner and outer man are to be copies of Christ. It is Christ's footsteps he is to walk in. It is Christ's image that he is to reflect. It is not Paul, nor Peter, nor Luther, nor Calvin, nor Rutherford that he is to copy--but Christ Himself. Other models may illustrate this, and so help in the imitation of Christ; but only as doing this are they useful; otherwise they are dangerous.

What then is a Christian man?

I. He is a man of FAITH. It was by giving credit to God's word that he became a Christian man; for it is by faith that we become sons of God. And his whole life is to be a life of faith. As Christ lived by faith on the Father, so does he. Christ is his model as a believing man. The more that he understands of Christ's life, the more will he see the faith that marks it, and will learn to copy it, to live, act, speak, and walk by faith.

II. He is a man of PRAYER. In this too he follows Christ. Christ's life was a life of prayer. In the morning we find Him praying a great while before day. All night we find Him praying more. No one, we would say, needed prayer less--yet no one prayed more. And the disciple herein imitates the Master. He prays without ceasing. He is instant in supplication. His life is a life of prayer--constant communion with God.

III. He is a man of HOPE. Christ looked to the joy set before Him--and so endured the cross. He anticipated the glory, and so was a man of hope. There is the hope, the same glory, the same joy for us. The things hoped for are the things we live upon and rejoice in. Our prospects are bright--and we keep them ever in view. The kingdom, the crown, the city, the inheritance--these are before our eyes. They cheer, and sustain, and purify us! Were it not for the hope, what would become of us? What would this world be to us? Learn to hope as well as to believe.

IV. He is man of HOLINESS. He is the follower of a holy Master. He hears the voice--Be holy, for I am holy. He knows that he is redeemed to be holy--to do good works--to follow righteousness--to be one of a peculiar people. He is not content with merely being saved--he seeks to put off sin, lust, evil, vanity--and to put on righteousness, holiness, and every heavenly characteristic. He seeks to rise higher and higher--to grow more unlike this world--more like the world to come. He marks Christ's footsteps, and walks in them. He studies the Master's mind, and seeks to possess it; mortifying his members and crucifying the flesh. He aims at shining as He shone, and testifying as He testified.

V. He is a man of LOVE. He has known Christ's love, and drunk it in, and found his joy in it. So he seeks to be like Him in love--to love the Father, to love the brethren, to love sinners--to show love at all times, in word and deed. His life is to be a life of love, his words the words of love, his daily doings the outflow of a heart of love. He is to be a living witness of the gospel of love. Love--not hatred, nor coldness, nor malice, nor revenge, nor selfishness, nor indifference--love such as was in Christ--that he endeavors to embody and exhibit.

VI. He is to be a man of ZEAL. 'Zeal for Your house has eaten me up,' said Christ. His life was one of zeal for God--zeal for His Father's honor and His Father's business. So is the disciple to be 'zealous of good works.' Zeal steady and fervent--not by fits and starts; not according to convenience, but in season and out of season; prudent, yet warm and loving; willing to suffer and to sacrifice; no sparing self or the flesh, but ever burning; zeal for Jehovah's glory, for Christ's name, for the Church's edification, for the salvation of lost men--this is to give complexion and character to his life.

These things are to mark a Christian man. He is not to be content with less. He is to grow in all these things--not to be barren, not to stagnate, not to be lukewarm--but to increase in resemblance to his Lord--to be transformed daily into His likeness, that there may be no mistake about him--as to who or what he is.

The last of the passages set down at the head of this mediation takes up something special in Christ which we are to imitate--His 'meekness and gentleness.' In the book of the Revelation He is chiefly known by the name of 'the Lamb.' That is His chief name in heaven. He has other titles, but this is given as peculiarly His in the place of His glory.

As Peter thus points to Christ as our model, so also does Paul in the above passage. One feature in His character he specially notes, which shone out very brightly in this coarse, crude world--a world where, all along, man has trodden down man, the stronger the weaker; where strong deeds, as well as strong language, have been accounted heroism and manliness--the proper expression of dignity and superiority--this feature is the Lord's submissive and non-resistance, even with the full consciousness of superior power--His 'meekness and gentleness.'

This meekness of Christ Paul takes up and points to. On this he bases his entreaties to the Corinthians. This is one of the strongest and most earnest of Paul's 'beseechings.' He has many of these; for he

'entreats' when he might 'command;' he uses love when he might wield the rod. 'I beseech you by the mercies of God' (Romans 12:1). 'I beseech you by the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the love of the Spirit' (Romans 15:30). 'We beseech you by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ' (2 Thessalonians 2:1). Here, it is by the meekness and gentleness of Christ that he beseeches.

And why does he beseech them by this? For two reasons--(1) He reminds them of this meekness and gentleness, as if to say, 'Imitate Him who you call Lord and Master and do not proudly withstand the authority of me His servant;' (2) he reminds them of it, as if to say, 'Do not constrain me, the servant, to make use of anything but the meekness and gentleness of the Master.' It is the apostle's last argument in dealing with the rebellious members of the Church. Is it not weighty? Is it not irresistible?

But it is chiefly the 'character of Christ' itself that we would dwell upon here, yet noticing also the bearing of that character upon the obedience of saints, and the submission of sinners to His rule.

I. The PERSON. It is 'the Christ of God.' He has many names, each revealing His person--the Word; the Son; the Only-begotten of the Father; the Light; Immanuel. These express the marvelous constitution of His person as the Christ; Son of God, and Son of man; very God and very man; the Word made flesh; having all divine and all human perfections, all created and all uncreated excellencies exhibited in Him, all fullness deposited in Him; full of grace and truth; the glory of Godhead; the glory of the King of kings.

II. The CHARACTER. It is that of meekness and gentleness--meekness in bearing and forbearing; gentleness in His tender loving treatment of us--both in word and deed. He is 'meek and lowly;' He did not strive nor cry, neither did any man hear His voice in the street; the bruised reed He broke not, the smoking flax He quenched not; He entered Jerusalem on an donkey's colt, as the prophet had written, 'Behold, your King comes' (Zechariah 9:9). No doubt there are other declarations which speak of wrath, and judgment, and vengeance; but these are His 'strange acts' as the great Judge.

His character, as exhibited on earth in all His words and works--was that of lowliness and love. Fury was not in Him. He bore the insults of sinners against Himself; when He was reviled, He reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not. He loved, He pitied, He wept, He invited, He entreated, He blessed. He frowned on none except the Pharisee. He spoke no harsh words--He displayed no repulsive looks or tones--He was ever courteous, polite, and affable. All in Him was grace--grace to the uttermost. He was the embodiment of that love which the Apostle Paul has described. He was patient, kind, not easily provoked, thinking no evil, rejoicing not in iniquity, bearing all things, believing all things, enduring all things, never failing! Meeker than Moses, gentler than John, more patient than Job, tenderer by far than His own tender earthly mother--He is in the embodiment of all that is winning and attractive.

All this He was on earth--all this He is still--unchanged and unchangeable--with nothing in Him or about Him to repel us--but everything to attract us--everything to win our confidence. At once the highest of the high, and the lowliest of the lowly. His is the almightiness of divine royalty, for all power is given here--yet the disposition to use that almightiness only to save, and comfort, and bless. Almighty meekness, and meek almightiness! Almighty gentleness, and gentle almightiness! How admirable! How glorious! How blessed! So holy, yet so meek and gentle to the unholy! So abhorrent of sin, yet so pitiful and patience toward the sinner! So capable of executing vengeance and utterly destroying His enemies, yet so patient, so gracious; not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance! So terrible as the Judge, yet so tender as the Savior! His is the iron rod, and the sword of vengeance, and the purging fan, and the devouring fire--yet He says--Come unto me. He weeps over Jerusalem. He prays for His

murderers. Ah, what meekness and gentleness are His! Nothing like it on earth, or in heaven--the meekness and gentleness of the God-man. 'Christ did not please Himself!'

III. The bearing of all this on us. It is not in vain that He is thus presented to us. This meekness and gentleness ought to show both on the believer and the unbeliever.

(1.) On the BELIEVER. The meekness and gentleness of Jesus is the strongest motive to our obedience and submission. It is the most impressive rebuke to all pride, or murmuring, or self-will. Having daily to do with one so meek and gentle, shall we not become like Him? Shall we not love Him, and shall we not honor His laws? Shall we not fear to offend Him, and shrink from wounding Him? O believer! Look at this meekness and gentleness, and put away all stubbornness, and self-will, and self-pleasing. And having to do with one so meek and gentle, shall we not put away from us all doubting, all despondency? Shall we allow one hard, one suspicious thought to linger within us? Shall we not put ourselves implicitly into His hands and trust Him forever?

(2.) On the UNBELIEVER. 'Come unto me' are the His first words to you. And His second are like unto them, 'Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.' Yes, He bids you come; He asks you to learn. He is the most accessible of all beings. His door is ever open; His heart is ever open; His arms are ever open. There is nothing in Him or about Him to repel you, though you are the chief of sinners, and the worst of men. His words to the sinner are pre-eminently the words of meekness and gentleness. They are infinitely attractive and encouraging. 'Him who comes to me I will never cast out.' Look at Him; listen to Him; draw near to Him; speak to Him; doubt not, despair not, depart not. Go up to Him--He will receive you. Tell Him your case--He will bid you welcome. He will not cast you away. He has patience to bear with all your foolishness, and ignorance, and stupidity, and unteachableness! He will not get angry with you, as proud men lose their temper with the unteachable or obstinate. He will bear with you. The greatness of your sins shall be no hindrance. The desperateness of your diseases will not make Him repel you. He will receive you graciously, and love you freely. Yes, He comes to you and says--'Behold, I stand at the door and knock!'

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