

The Path of Progress: Walking in the Spirit

by Watchman Nee

The sermon emphasizes the importance of living in the Spirit and trusting in Christ to overcome our fleshly lusts and weaknesses.

Scripture: Romans 8:1

Topics: "Walking In The Spirit", "Trusting the Holy Spirit"

Description

Watchman Nee emphasizes the necessity of walking in the Spirit as a vital aspect of the Christian experience, contrasting the states of being 'in Adam' and 'in Christ' with living 'in the flesh' versus 'in the Spirit'. He explains that while being in Christ is an objective truth, the subjective experience of walking in the Spirit is essential for manifesting the life of Christ within us. Nee illustrates that true Christian living is not about striving in our own strength but trusting the Holy Spirit to produce the life of Christ in us, leading to victory over sin and a fulfilling relationship with God. He encourages believers to recognize that Christ is our life and that the Holy Spirit empowers us to live out that reality daily. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a deeper reliance on the Holy Spirit to fulfill God's will in our lives.

Transcript

Coming to Romans 8 we may first summarize the argument of our second section of the letter from chapter 5. 12 to chapter 8. 39 in two phrases, each containing a contrast and each marking an aspect of Christian experience. They are: Romans 5.12 to 6.23: 'In Adam' and 'in Christ'. Romans 7.1 to 8. 39: 'In the flesh' and 'in the spirit'.

We need to understand the relationship of these four things. The former two are 'objective' and set forth our position, firstly as we were by nature and secondly as we now are by faith in the redemptive work of Christ. The latter two are 'subjective' and relate to our walk as a matter of practical experience. Scripture makes it clear that the first two give us only a part of the picture and that the second two are required to complete it. We think it enough to be " in Christ ", but we learn now that we must also walk " in the spirit " (Rom. 8.9). The frequent occurrence of " the Spirit " in the early part of Romans 8 serves to emphasize this further important lesson of the Christian life.

THE FLESH AND THE SPIRIT

The flesh is linked with Adam; the Spirit with Christ. Leaving aside now as settled the question of whether we are in Adam or in Christ, we must ask ourselves: Am I living in the flesh or in the Spirit? To live in the

flesh is to do something 'out from'* myself as in Adam. It is to derive strength from the old natural source of life that I inherited from him, so that I enjoy in experience all Adam's very complete provision for sinning which all of us have found so effective. Now the same is true of what is in Christ. To enjoy in experience what is true of me as in Him, I must learn what it is to walk in the Spirit. It is a historic fact that in Christ my old man was crucified, and it is a present fact that I am blessed " with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ " (Eph. 1. 3) ; but if I do not live in the Spirit, then my life may be quite a contradiction of the fact that I am in Christ, for what is true of me in Him is not expressed in me. I may recognize that I am in Christ, but I may also have to face the fact that my old temper is very much in evidence. What is the trouble? It is that I am holding the truth merely objectively, whereas what is true objectively must be made true subjectively; and that is brought about as I live in the Spirit.

Not only am I in Christ, but Christ is in me. And just as physically a man cannot live and work in water but only in air, so spiritually Christ dwells and manifests Himself not in 'flesh' but in 'spirit'. Therefore if I live " after the flesh " I find that what is mine in Christ is, so to say, held in suspense in me. Though in fact I am in Christ, yet if I live in the flesh-that is, in my own strength and under my own direction-then in experience I find to my dismay that it is what is in Adam that manifests itself in me. If I would know in experience all that is in Christ, then I must learn to live in the Spirit.

* The author has in mind the Greek preposition ek, the sense of which is not easily conveyed by any single English word.-ED.

Living in the Spirit means that I trust the Holy Spirit to do in me what I cannot do myself. This life is completely different from the life I would naturally live of myself. Each time I am faced with a new demand from the Lord, I look to Him to do in me what He requires of me. It is not a case of trying but of trusting ; not of struggling but of resting in Him. If I have a hasty temper, impure thoughts, a quick tongue or a critical spirit, I shall not set out with a determined effort to change myself, but, reckoning myself dead in Christ to these things, I shall look to the Spirit of God to produce in me the needed purity or humility or meekness. This is what it means to " stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you " (Exod. 14. 13).

Some of you have no doubt had an experience something like the following. You have been asked to go and see a friend, and you knew the friend was not very friendly, but you trusted the Lord to see you through. You told Him before you set out that in yourself you could not but fail, and you asked Him for all that was needed. Then, to your surprise, you did not feel at all irritated, though your friend was far from gracious. On your return you thought over the experience and marvelled that you kept so calm, and you wondered if you would be just as calm next time. You were amazed at yourself and sought an explanation. This is the explanation: the Holy Spirit carried you through.

Unfortunately we only have this kind of experience once in a while, but it should be a constant experience. When the Holy Spirit takes things in hand there is no need for strain on our part. It is not a case of clenching our teeth and thinking that thus we have controlled ourselves beautifully and have had a glorious victory. No, where there is a real victory there is no fleshly effort. We are gloriously carried through by the Lord. The object of temptation is always to get us to do something.

During the first three months of the Japanese war in China we lost a great many tanks and so were unable to deal with the Japanese tanks, until the following scheme was devised. A single shot would be fired at a Japanese tank by one of our snipers in ambush. After a considerable lapse of time the first shot would be

followed by a second ; then, after a further silence, by another shot ; until the tank driver, eager to locate the source of the disturbance, would pop his head out to look around. The next shot, carefully aimed, would put an end to him. As long as he remained under cover he was perfectly safe. The whole scheme was devised to bring him out into the open. In the same way, Satan's temptations are not primarily to make us do something particularly sinful, but merely to cause us to act in our own energy, and as soon as we step out of our hiding-place to do some thing on that basis, he has gained the victory over us. If we do not move, if we do not come out of the cover of Christ into the realm of the flesh, then he cannot get us.

The Divine way of victory does not permit of our doing anything at all-anything, that is to say, outside of Christ. This is because as soon as we move we run into danger, for our natural inclinations take us in the wrong direction. Where, then, are we to look for help? Turn now to Galatians 5.17: " The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh ". In other words, the flesh does not fight against us but against the Holy Spirit, " for these are contrary the one to the other ", and it is He, not we, who meets and deals with the flesh. What is the result? " That ye may not do the things that ye would."

I think we have often understood that last clause of this verse in a wrong sense. Let us consider what it means. What 'would we do' naturally? We would move off on some course of action dictated by our own instincts and apart from the will of God. The effect then of our refusal to act out from ourselves is that the Holy Spirit is free to meet and deal with the flesh in us, with the result that we shall not do what we naturally would do; that is, we shall not act according to our natural inclinations; we shall not go off on a course and plan of our own: but shall find instead our satisfaction in His perfect plan.

Hence we have the principle: " Walk by the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh " (Gal. 5.16). If we live in the Spirit, if we walk by faith in the risen Christ, we can truly 'stand aside' while the Spirit gains new victories over the flesh every day. He has been given to us to take charge of this business. Our victory lies in hiding in Christ, and in counting in simple trust upon His Holy Spirit to overcome in us our fleshly lusts with His own new desires. The Cross has been given to procure salvation for us ; the Spirit has been given to produce salvation in us. Christ risen and ascended is the basis of our salvation ; Christ in our hearts by the Spirit is its power.

CHRIST OUR LIFE

I thank God through Jesus Christ "! That exclamation of Paul's is fundamentally the same as his other words in Galatians 2. 20 which we have taken as the key to our study: " I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ ". We saw how prominent is the word ' I ' throughout his argument in Romans 7, culminating in the agonized cry: " O wretched man that I am! " Then follows the shout of deliverance: " Thank God ... Jesus Christ " and it is clear that the discovery Paul has made is this, that the life we live is the life of Christ alone. We think of the Christian life as a 'changed life' but it is not that. God offers us an ' exchanged life ', a ' substituted life ', and Christ is our Substitute within. " I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me." This life is not something which we ourselves have to produce. It is Christ's own life reproduced in us.

How many Christians believe in 'reproduction' in this sense, as something more than regeneration? Regeneration means that the life of Christ is planted in us by the Holy Spirit at our new birth. 'Reproduction' goes further: it means that that new life grows and becomes manifest progressively in us, until the very likeness of Christ begins to be reproduced in our lives. That is what Paul means when he speaks of his travail for the Galatians " until Christ be formed in you " (Gal. 4. 19).

Let me illustrate with another story. I once arrived in America in the home of a saved couple who requested me to pray for them. I inquired the cause of their trouble. 'Oh, Mr. Nee, we have been in a bad way lately', they confessed. 'We are so easily irritated by the children, and during the past few weeks we have both lost our tempers several times a day. We are really dishonouring the Lord. Will you ask Him to give us patience?' 'That is the one thing I cannot do', I said. 'What do you mean?' they asked. 'I mean that one thing is certain', I answered, 'and that is that God is not going to answer your prayer.' At that they said in amazement, 'Do you mean to tell us we have gone so far that God is not willing to hear us when we ask Him to make us patient?' 'No, I do not mean quite that, but I would like to ask you if you have ever prayed in this respect. You have. But did God answer? No! Do you know why? Because you have no need of patience.' Then the eyes of the wife blazed up. She said, 'What do you mean? We do not need patience, and yet we get irritated the whole day long! What do you mean?' 'It is not patience you have need of I answered, it is Christ.'

God will not give me humility or patience or holiness or love as separate gifts of His grace. He is not a retailer dispensing grace to us in doses, measuring out some patience to the impatient, some love to the unloving, some meekness to the proud, in quantities that we take and work on as a kind of capital. He has given only one gift to meet all our need-His Son Christ Jesus, and as I look to Him to live out His life in me, He will be humble and patient and loving and everything else I need-in my stead. Remember the word in the first Epistle of John: - God gave unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath the life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life " (I John 5.11, 12). The life of God is not given us as a separate item; the life of God is given us in the Son. It is " eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord " (Rom. 6. 23). Our relationship to the Son is our relationship to the life.

It is a blessed thing to discover the difference between Christian graces and Christ: to know the difference between meekness and Christ, between patience and Christ , between love and Christ. Remember again what is said in I Corinthians 1. 30: "Christ Jesus ... was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption." The common conception of sanctification is that every item of the life should be holy; but that is not holiness, it is the fruit of holiness. Holiness is Christ. It is the Lord Jesus being made over to us to be that. So you can put in anything there: love, humility, power, self-control, To-day there is a call for patience: He is our patience! Tomorrow the call may be for purity: He is our purity! He is the answer to every need. That is why Paul speaks of " the fruit of the Spirit " as one (Gal. 5. 2 2) and not of ' fruits' as separate items. God has given us His Holy Spirit, and when love is needed the fruit of the Spirit is love ; when joy is needed the fruit of the Spirit is joy. It is always true. It does not matter what your personal deficiency, or whether it is a hundred and one different things, God has one sufficient answer-His Son Jesus Christ, and He is the answer to every human need.

How can we know more of Christ in this way? Only by way of an increasing awareness of need. Some are afraid to discover deficiency in themselves and so they never grow. Growth in grace is the only sense in which we can grow, and grace, we have said, is God doing something for us. We all have the same Christ dwelling within, but revelation of some new need will lead us spontaneously to trust Him to live out His life in us in that particular. Greater capacity means greater enjoyment of God's supply. Another letting go, a fresh trusting in Christ, and another stretch of land is conquered. 'Christ my life' is the secret of enlargement.

We have spoken of trying and trusting, and the difference between the two. Believe me, it is the difference between Heaven and hell. It is not something just to be talked over as a good thought; it is stark reality. 'Lord, I cannot do it, therefore I will no longer try to do it.' This is the point where most of us fail. 'Lord, I

cannot; therefore I will take my hands off ; from now on I trust Thee for that.' I refuse to act; I depend on Him to act and then I enter fully and joyfully into the action He initiates. It is not passivity ; it is a most active life, trusting the Lord like that; drawing life from Him, taking Him to be my very life, letting Him live out His life in me.

THE LAW OF THE SPIRIT OF LIFE

There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made free from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8. 1, 2, A.V.). It is in chapter 8 that Paul presents to us in detail the positive side of life in the Spirit. " There is therefore now no condemnation ", he begins, and this statement may at first seem out of place here. Surely condemnation was met by the

Blood, through which we found peace with God and salvation from wrath (Rom. 5. 1, 9). But there are two kinds of condemnation, namely, that before God and that before myself (just as earlier we saw there are two kinds of peace) and the second may at times seem to us even more awful than the first. When I see that the Blood of Christ has satisfied God, then I know my sins are forgiven, and there is for me no more condemnation before God. Yet I may still be knowing defeat, and the sense of inward condemnation on this account may be very real, as Romans 7 shows. But if I have learned to live by Christ as my life, then I have learned the secret of victory, and, praise God! " there is therefore now no condemnation ". " The mind of the spirit is life and peace " (Rom. 8. 6), and this becomes my experience as I learn to walk in the Spirit. With peace in my heart I have no time to feel condemned, but only to praise Him who leads me on from victory to victory.

But what lay behind my sense of condemnation? Was it not the experience of defeat and the sense of helplessness to do anything about it? Before I saw that Christ is my life, I laboured under a constant sense of handicap; limitation dogged my steps; I felt disabled at every turn. I was always crying out: 'I cannot do this! I cannot do that!' Try as I would, I found that I " cannot please God " (Rom. 8. 8). But there is no 'I cannot' in Christ. Now it is : " I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me " (Phil. 4. 13).

How can Paul be so daring? On what ground does he declare that he is now free from limitation and " can do all things "? Here is his answer: " For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death " (Rom. 8. 2). Why is there no more condemnation? " For - . . . " : there is a reason for it; there is something definite to account for it. The reason is that there is a law called " the law of the Spirit of life " and -it has proved stronger than another law called " the law of sin and of death ". What are these laws? How do they operate? And what is the difference between sin and the law of sin, and between death and the law of death?

First let us ask ourselves, What is a law? Well, strictly speaking, a law is a generalisation examined until it is proved that there is no exception. We might define it more simply as something which happens over and over again. Each time the thing happens it happens in the same way. We can illustrate this both from statutory and from natural law. For example, in this land, if I drive a car on the right hand side of the road the traffic police will stop me. Why? Because it is against the law of the land. If you do it you will be stopped too. Why? - For the same reason that I would be stopped: it is against the law and the law makes no exceptions. It is something which happens repeatedly and unfailingly. Or again, we all know what is meant by gravity. If I drop my handkerchief in London it falls to the ground. That is the effect of gravity. But the same is true if I drop it in New York or Hong Kong. No matter where I let it go, gravity operates, and it

always produces the same results.

Whenever the same conditions prevail the same effects are seen. There is thus a 'law' of gravity. Now what of the law of sin and death? If someone passes an unkind remark about me, at once something goes wrong inside me. That is not law ; that is sin. But if, when different people pass unkind remarks, the same ' something' goes wrong inside, then I discern a law within-a law of sin. Like the law of gravity, it is something constant. It always works the same way. And so too with the law of death. Death, we have said, is weakness produced to its limit. Weakness is ' I cannot'. Now if when I try to please God in this particular matter I find I cannot, and if when I try to please Him in that other thing I again find I cannot, then I discern a law at work. There is not only sin in me but a law of sin; there is not only death in me but a law of death.

Then again, not only is gravity a law in the sense that it is constant, admitting of no exception, but, unlike the rule of the road, it is a 'natural' law and not the subject of discussion and decision but of discovery. The law is there, and the handkerchief 'naturally' drops by itself without any help from me. And the " law " discovered by the man in Romans 7. 23 is just like that. It is a law of sin and of death, opposed to that which is good, and crippling the man's will to do good. He' naturally' sins according to the " law of sin " in his members. He wills to be different, but that law in him is relentless and no human will can resist it. So this brings me to the question,

How can I be set free from the law of sin and death? I need deliverance from sin, and still more do I need deliverance from death, but most of all I need deliverance from the law of sin and of death. How can I be delivered from the constant repetition of weakness and failure? In order to answer this question let us follow out our two illustrations further. One of our great burdens in China used to be the likin tax, a law which none could escape, originating in the Ch'in Dynasty and operating right down to our own day. It was an inland tax on the transit of goods, applied throughout the empire and having numerous barriers for collection, and officers enjoying very large powers. The result was that the charge on goods passing through several provinces might become very heavy indeed. But a few years ago a second law came into operation which set aside the likin law. Can you imagine the feelings of relief in those who had suffered under the old law? Now there was no need to think or hope or pray; the new law was already there and had delivered us from the old law. No longer was there need to think beforehand what one would say if one met a likin officer to- morrow!

And as with the law of the land, so it is with natural law. How can the law of gravity be annulled? With regard to my handkerchief that law is at work clearly enough, pulling it down, but I have only to place my hand under the handkerchief and it does not drop. Why? The law is still there. I do not deal with the law of gravity; in fact I cannot deal with the law of gravity. Then why does my handkerchief not fall to the ground? Because there is a power keeping it from doing so. The law is there, but another law superior to it is operating to overcome it, namely the law of life. Gravity can do its utmost but the handkerchief will not drop, because another law is working against the law of gravity to maintain it there. We have all seen the tree which was once a small seed fallen between the slabs of a paving, and which has grown until heavy stone blocks have been lifted by the power of the life within it. That is what we mean by the triumph of one law over another.

In just such a manner God delivers us from one law by introducing another law. The law of sin and death is there all the time, but God has put another law into operation-the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, and that law is strong enough to deliver us from the law of sin and death. You see, it is a law of life in Christ Jesus-the resurrection life that in Him has met death in all its forms and triumphed over it (Eph. 1.

19, 20). The Lord Jesus dwells in our hearts in the person of His Holy Spirit, and if we let Him have a clear way and commit ourselves to Him we shall find that He will keep us from the old law. We shall learn what it is to be kept, not by our own power, but " by the power of God " (1 Peter 1. 5). THE

MANIFESTATION OF THE LAW OF LIFE

Let us seek to make this practical. We touched earlier on the matter of our will in relation to the things of God. Even older Christians do not realise how great a part will-power plays in their lives. That was part of Paul's trouble in Romans 7. His will was good, but all his actions contradicted it, and however much he made up his mind and set himself to please God, it led him only into worse darkness. 'I would do good', but " I am carnal, sold under sin ". That is the point. Like a car without petrol, that has to be pushed and that stops as soon as it is left alone, many Christians endeavour to drive themselves by will-power, and then think the Christian life a most exhausting and bitter one. Some even force themselves to say 'Hallelujah!' because others do it, while admitting there is no meaning in it to them. They force themselves to be what they are not, and it is worse than trying to make water run up-hill. For after all, the very highest point the will can reach is that of willingness (Matt. 26.41).

If we have to exert so much effort in our Christian living, it simply says that we are not really like that at all. We don't need to force ourselves to speak our native language. In fact we only have to exert will-power in order to do things we do not do naturally. We may do them for a time, but the law of sin and death wins in the end. We may be able to say: 'To will is present with me, and I perform that which is good for two weeks', but eventually we shall have to confess: 'How to perform it I know not'. No, what I already am I do not long to be. If I " would " it is because I am not. You ask, Why do men use will-power to try to please God? There may be two reasons. They may of course never have experienced the new birth, in which case they have no new life to draw upon; or they may have been born again and the life be there, but they have not learned to trust in that life. It is this lack of understanding that results in habitual failure and sinning, bringing them to the place where they almost cease to believe in the possibility of anything better.

But because we have not believed fully, that does not mean that the feeble life we intermittently experience is all God has given us. Romans 6. 23 states that " the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord ", and now in Romans 8. 2 we read that " the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus " has come to our aid. So Romans 8. 2 speaks not of a new gift but of the life already referred to in Romans 6. 23. In other words, it is a new revelation of what we already have. I feel I cannot emphasize this too much. It is not something fresh from God's hand, but a new unveiling of what He has already given. It is a new discovery of a work already done in Christ, for the words " made me free " are in the past tense. If I really see this and put my faith in Him, there is no absolute necessity for Romans 7 to be repeated in me-either the experience or the conduct, and certainly not the tremendous display of will-power.

If we will let go our own wills and trust Him, we shall not fall to the ground and break, but we shall fall into a different law, the law of the Spirit of life. For God has given us not only life but a law of life. And just as the law of gravity is a natural law and not the result of human legislation, so the law of life is a 'natural' law, similar in principle to the law that keeps our heart beating or that controls the movement of our eyelids. There is no need for us to think about our eyes, or to decide that we must blink every so often to keep them cleansed; and still less do we bring our will to bear upon our heart. Indeed to do so might rather harm than help it. No, so long as it has life it works spontaneously. Our wills only interfere with the law of life. I discovered that fact once in the following way.

I used to suffer from sleeplessness. Once after several sleepless nights, when I had prayed much about it and exhausted all my resources, I confessed at length to God that the fault must lie with me and asked to be shown where. I said to God: 'I demand an explanation'. His answer was: 'Believe in nature's laws'. Sleep is as much a law as hunger is, and I realised that though I had never thought of worrying whether I would get hungry or not, I had been worrying about sleeping. I had been trying to help nature, and that is the chief trouble with most sufferers from sleeplessness. But now I trusted not only God but God's law of nature, and slept well. Should we not read the Bible? Of course we should or our spiritual life will suffer. But that should not mean forcing ourselves to read. There is a new law in us which gives us a hunger for it. Then half an hour can be more profitable than five hours of forced reading. And it is the same with giving, with preaching, with testimony. Forced preaching is apt to result in preaching a warm gospel with a cold heart, and we all know what men mean by 'cold charity'.

If we will let ourselves live in the new law we shall be less conscious of the old law. It is still there, but it is no longer governing and we are no longer in its grip. That is why the Lord says in Matthew 6: "Behold the birds . . . Consider the lilies ". If we could ask the birds whether they were not afraid of the law of gravity, how would they reply? They would say: 'We never heard the name of Newton. We know nothing about his law. We fly because it is the law of our life to fly.' Not only is there in them a life with the power of flight, but that life has a law which enables these living creatures quite spontaneously and consistently to overcome the law of gravity. Yet gravity remains. If you get up early one morning when the cold is intense and the snow thick on the ground, and there is a dead sparrow in the courtyard, you are reminded at once of the persistence of that law. But while birds live they overcome it, and the life within them is what dominates their consciousness.

God has been truly gracious to us. He has given us this new law of the Spirit, and for us to 'fly' is no longer a question of our will but of His life. Have you noticed what a trial it is to make an impatient Christian patient? To require patience of him is enough to make him ill with depression. But God has never told us to force ourselves to be what we are not naturally: to try by taking thought to add to our spiritual stature.

Worrying may possibly decrease a man's height, but it certainly never added anything to it. "Be not anxious", are His words. "Consider the lilies, . . . they grow." He is directing our attention to the new law of life in us. Oh, for a new appreciation of the life that is ours! What a precious discovery this is! It can make altogether new men of us, for it operates in the smallest things as well as in the bigger ones. It checks us when, for example, we put out a hand to look at a book in someone else's room, reminding us that we have not asked permission and have no right to do so. We cannot, the Holy Spirit tells us, encroach thus upon the rights of others. Once I was talking to a Christian friend and he turned to me and said: 'Do you know, I believe that if anyone is willing to live by the law of the Spirit of life, such a man will become truly refined.' 'What do you mean?' I asked. He replied: 'That law has the power to make a man a perfect gentleman. Some scornfully say: "You can't blame those people for the way they act; they are just country folk and have no educational advantages." But the real question is, Have they the life of the Lord within? For I tell you, that life can say to them: "Your voice is too loud or, `That laughter was not right", or, "Your motive in passing that remark was wrong." In a thousand details the Spirit of life can tell them how to act, so producing in them a true refinement. There is no such inherent power in education.' And yet my friend was himself an educationalist!

But it is true. Take the example of talkativeness. Are you a person of too many words? When you stay with people, do you say to yourself: 'What shall I do? I am a Christian; but if I am to glorify the name of the

Lord, I simply must not talk so much. So to-day let me be extra careful to hold myself in check.'? And for an hour or two you succeed until on some pretext you lose control and, before you know where you are, find yourself once again in difficulty with your garrulous tongue. Yes, let us be fully assured that the will is useless here. For me to exhort you to exercise your will in this matter would be but to offer you the vain religion of the world ' not the life in Christ Jesus. For consider again: a talkative person remains just that, though he keep silent all day, for there is a 'natural' law of talkativeness governing him (or her!), just as a peach tree is a peach tree whether or not it bears peaches. But as Christians we discover a new law in us, the law of the Spirit of life, which transcends all else and which has already delivered us from the ' law ' of our talkativeness. If, believing the Lord's Word, we yield ourselves to that new law, it will tell us when we should stop talking or not start! -and it will empower us to do so. On that basis you can go to your friend's house for two or three hours, or stay for two or three days, and experience no difficulty. On your return you will just thank God for His new law of life.

It is this spontaneous life that is the Christian life. It manifests itself in love for the unlovely- for the brother whom on natural grounds we would not like and certainly could not love. It works on the basis of what the Lord sees of possibility in that brother. 'Lord, You see he is lovable and You love him. Love him, now, through me!' And it manifests itself in reality of life in a true genuineness of moral character. There is too much hypocrisy in the lives of Christians, too much playacting. Nothing takes away from the effectiveness of Christian witness as does a pretence of something that is not really there, for the man in the street unflinchingly penetrates such a disguise in the end and finds us out for what we are. Yes, pretence gives way to reality when we trust the law of life.

THE FOURTH STEP: "WALK ... AFTER THE SPIRIT"

" For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit " (Rom. 8. 3, 4). Every careful reader of these two verses will see that there are two things presented here. They are, firstly, what the Lord Jesus has done for us, and secondly, what the Holy Spirit will do in us. " The flesh " is " weak " ; consequently the ordinance of the law cannot be fulfilled in us " after the flesh ". (Remember, it is again here a question not of salvation but of pleasing God.) Now, because of our inability God took two steps.

In the first place, He intervened to deal with the heart of our problem. He sent His Son in the flesh, who died for sin and in doing so " condemned sin in the flesh ". That is to say, He took to death representatively all that belonged to the old creation in us, whether we speak of it as ' our old man', the flesh or the carnal ' I '. Thus God struck at the very root of our trouble by removing the fundamental ground of our weakness. This was the first step. But still " the ordinance of the law " remained to be fulfilled " in us ". How could this be done? It required God's further provision of the indwelling Holy Spirit. It is He who is sent to take care of the inward side of this thing, and He is able to do so, we are told, as we " walk ... after the Spirit ". What does it mean to walk after the Spirit? It means two things. Firstly, it is not a work; it is a walk. Praise God, the burdensome and fruitless effort I involved myself in when I sought 'in the flesh' to please God gives place to a blessed and restful dependence on " his working, which worketh in me mightily " (Col. 1. 29). That is why Paul contrasts the " works " of the flesh with the fruit " of the Spirit (Gal. 5. 19, 22).

Then secondly, to "walk after" implies subjection. Walking after the flesh means that I yield to the dictates of the flesh, and the following verses in Romans 8. 5 - 8 make clear where that leads me. It only brings me into conflict with God. To walk after the Spirit is to be subject to the Spirit. There is one thing that the man

who walks after the Spirit cannot do, and that is be independent of Him. I must be subject to the Holy Spirit. The initiative of my life must be with Him. Only as I yield myself to obey Him shall I find the " law of the Spirit of life " in full operation and the " ordinance of the law " (all that I have been trying to do to please God) being fulfilled-no longer by me but in me. " As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God " (Rom. 8. 14). We are all familiar with the words of the benediction in 2 Corinthians 13. 14: " The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all ". The love of God is the source of all spiritual blessing ; the grace of the Lord Jesus has made it possible for that spiritual wealth to become ours; and the communion of the Holy Ghost is the means whereby it is imparted to us.

Love is something hidden in the heart of God ; grace is that love expressed and made available in the Son; communion is the impartation of that grace by the Spirit. What the Father has devised concerning us the Son has accomplished for us, and now the Holy Spirit communicates it to us. When therefore we discover something fresh that the Lord Jesus has procured for us in His Cross, let us, for its realisation, look in the direction that God has indicated, and, by our steadfast attitude of subjection and obedience to the Holy Spirit, keep wide open the way for Him to impart it to us. That is His ministry. He has come for that very purpose-that He may make real in us all that is ours in Christ. We have learned in China that, when leading a soul to Christ, we must be very thorough, for there is no certainty when he will again have the help of other Christians. We always seek to make it clear to a new believer that, when he has asked the Lord to forgive his sins and to come into his life, his heart has become the residence of a living Person.

The Holy Spirit of God is now within him, to open to him the Scriptures that he may find Christ there, to direct his prayer, to govern his life, and to reproduce in him the character of his Lord. I went, late one summer, for a prolonged period of rest to a hill-resort where accommodation was difficult to obtain, and while there it was necessary for me to sleep in one house and take my meals in another, the latter being the home of a mechanic and his wife. For the first two weeks of my visit, apart from asking a blessing at each meal, I said nothing to my hosts about the Gospel; and then one day my opportunity came to tell them about the Lord Jesus. They were ready to listen and to come to Him in simple faith for the forgiveness of their sins. They were born again, and a new light and joy came into their lives, for theirs was a real conversion. I took care to make clear to them what had happened, and then, as the weather turned colder, the time came for me to leave them and return to Shanghai.

During the cold winter months the man was in the habit of drinking wine with his meals, and he was apt to do so to excess. After my departure, with the return of the cold weather, the wine appeared on the table again, and that day, as he had become accustomed to do, the husband bowed his head to return thanks for the meal but no words would come. After one or two vain attempts he turned to his wife. 'What is wrong?' he asked. 'Why cannot we pray to-day? Fetch the Bible and see what it has to say about wine-drinking.' I had left a copy of the Scriptures with them, but though the wife could read she was ignorant of the Word, and she turned the pages in vain seeking for light on the subject. They did not know how to consult God's Book and it was impossible to consult God's messenger, for I was many miles away and it might be months before they could see me. 'Just drink your wine', said his wife. 'We'll refer the matter to brother Nee at the first opportunity.' But still the man found he just could not return thanks to the Lord for that wine. 'Take it away!' he said at length; and when she had done so, together they asked a blessing on their meal.

When eventually the man was able to visit Shanghai he told me the story. Using an expression familiar in Chinese: 'Brother Nee', he said, 'Resident Boss* wouldn't let me have that drink! ' ' Very good, brother', I

said. 'You always listen to Resident Boss!' Many of us know that Christ is our life. We believe that the Spirit of God is resident in us, but this fact has little effect upon our behaviour. The question is, do we know Him as a living Person, and do we know Him as Boss '?

'Resident Boss'-The author's own rendering of li-mien tang chia tih.-ED.

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