

WALK BY THIS RULE. - R1840

"And as many as walk according to this rule,
peace be on them and mercy." – Gal. 6:16.

PEACE, rest of mind, tranquility of soul, is the happiness that all men crave, yet seek for in vain, because they seek it where it cannot be found. God created man for his own pleasure (Rev. 4:11; Isa. 43:7) and in his own image, so that man's true pleasure, happiness and peace should be found only in harmony, fellowship and sympathy with his Creator, that thus the fellowship of the Creator and the creature might be responsive. He wanted that love should respond to love, admiration to admiration, virtue to virtue, and grace to grace, in the Creator and the creature, as face answers to face in a glass. In this natural attitude of the Creator and the creature generous benevolence and filial gratitude combine in mutual happiness. God is happy in the realization and in the exercise of all the noble traits of his glorious character, which happiness is enhanced by appreciation of the same on the part of his creatures, and by manifestation in them of the same qualities and dispositions of mind and heart. And likewise man must both realize and exercise the noble endowments of his nature and form a character modeled after that of his heavenly Father and meeting his approval, if he would find that true happiness which consists in the approval of his own conscience and of his Creator and Judge, in whose favor is life, and "at whose right hand there are pleasures forevermore." – Psa. 16:11.

True, all men have lost much of the original likeness of God, but this does not alter the fact that they still crave the happiness and peace which can never be found except under the natural, original relations to his Creator. No matter how deep a man may sink in sin, how far he may stray from the path of rectitude, how low and vile he may become, he still remembers that he is a man, a member of that noble though fallen race which God created in his own likeness, and he knows and feels his degradation. He knows that he was made for higher and nobler ends than those toward which he is ever tending, although he has neither inclination nor desire to strive toward those nobler ends, not having the fortitude to resist the inherited and long-cultivated bias of his fallen nature.

In this painful realization of the absence of true happiness and peace of mind and heart, men have sought for happiness and peace in ways in harmony with the more or less depraved tendencies of the fallen nature – in the poor substitutes which pride, ambition, strife, rivalry, wealth, fame, power, etc., have to offer; but the happiness they find in these is only delusive, and at most very short-lived. The bubble of success may burst in an instant, and the peace and happiness built upon it be utterly wrecked.

There is no peace, therefore, to any man except in the reestablished relationship between himself and his God. And since this relationship of sons can only be reestablished through Christ, there is no peace to any man out of Christ. "There is no peace, saith the Lord, to the wicked." (Isa. 48:22.) And "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things have passed away, and behold all things have become new" (2 Cor. 5:17): he has "passed from death unto life," and has found the peace which the world can neither give nor take away. He realizes himself a son and heir of God. And to these justified sons and heirs of this age God has not only granted his recognition, but also his special favor, in offering to them exceeding great and precious promises – to become sons of God on a higher plane, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, the conditions of which relationship are that we follow in his footsteps of sacrifice, even unto death.

Those who thus covenant with God are begotten of the spirit of God, and as many such as are thenceforth led of the spirit of God, they are the recognized sons of God (Rom. 8:14), while those who fail to recognize, appreciate and accept the great favor offered, lose the benefit of their reckoned justification in this age.

It is to these new creatures, begotten and led of the spirit of God, that the words of our text are addressed – As many such as walk by this rule, peace be on them and mercy. The rule referred to is the rule of the new creature mentioned in the preceding verse – "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." Forms and ceremonies are not the rule, but the new life itself, the new creature filled with the holy spirit of God and led of the spirit. "Walk in the spirit," says the Apostle,

"and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh; for the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other." – Gal. 5:16,17.

To as many as walk by this rule are promised peace and mercy – mercy, because our best efforts to walk after the leading of the holy spirit will be imperfect; but God who judges our heart's desires and efforts is merciful and will not exact from us more than we are able to perform. And therefore, notwithstanding our lameness and halting steps in following the lead of the spirit, he gives his blessed peace to all them that walk by this rule – the rule of the holy spirit, the rule of the new creature.

Now if any man be in Christ, a new creature, he has put away the old man – the carnal nature, which is enmity against God and is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be – with all his evil deeds, which the Apostle thus enumerates (Gal. 5:19-21), "Now the works of the flesh [the carnal nature] are manifest, which are these: Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings and such like, of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

While we might wonder that the Apostle, in addressing the saints, should make mention of the grosser forms of sin which could only be predicated of those who have fallen from grace, when we consider, we see that it would not have done to leave these out, because they belong to the category of evils which are opposed to the spirit of God, and can have no place in his Kingdom. Then, again, they are the abominable ends to which the lesser evils inevitably tend, as the nature of sin is always progressive. The Apostle gives fair warning that those who do such things, no matter how loud may be their professions, have no inheritance in the Kingdom of God; and therefore they have no right to the fellowship of the saints upon whom, and the cause of Christ in general, they bring only disgrace.

But the effect of the rule of the spirit, in all those who are truly new creatures, begotten of God and led of his spirit, is very differently described by the

Apostle. He says, "But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and desires." If we are living according to the rule of the new nature, following the leading of the spirit of God, then we must have these fruits in some measure, even from the very start of our Christian experience; and if we are following on to know the Lord and to walk in the spirit, these fruits are surely growing and becoming more and more manifest to all with whom we are associated.

If those who are in Christ would observe this principle, and deal with each other as ***new creatures***, much discord would be avoided; for the motives and endeavors of the "new creature" would be considered, and not the frailties or mistakes of the "earthen vessel." ***"Let us follow*** the things that make for peace." – Rom. 14:19; 1 Thes. 5:13.