

CHAPTER VI

WALKING WITH GOD

"Can two walk together, except they be agreed?"—
Amos iii. 3.

THE Christian life is described and illustrated in Holy Scripture by means of several faculties and actions of the human body. Sometimes the eye is used: "*Look* unto Me, and be ye saved" (Isa. xlv. 22). At other times the ear is mentioned: "*Hear*, and your soul shall live" (Isa. lv. 8). Yet again we have the hand: "Let him *take hold* of my strength (Isa. xxvii. 5). And not infrequently the mouth is employed: "O *taste* and see that the Lord is good" (Ps. xxxiv. 8). But perhaps the commonest, and in some respects the most suggestive, is the illustration of the "walk" which is found very frequently both in the Old and the New Testaments. In the short Epistle to the Ephesians the metaphor of "walking" is found no less than seven times. There is a remarkable appropriateness in this use of the metaphor of walking to express the Christian life. Walking is one of the few perfect forms of exercise, those in which all parts of the body are brought into play; and its suggestiveness and appropriateness

for Christianity are evident when we remember that religion is intended to affect with vital, practical reality every part of our being, and that every faculty of our nature is to be exercised to the fullest possible extent, "ever, only, all" for God.

This thought of the Christian life as a walk is suggested by the text that heads this chapter. God speaking by the prophet is reminding Israel of their great spiritual privileges derived from fellowship with God, declaring to them at the same time their sin in wandering from Him and showing the utter impossibility of the continuance of the old fellowship unless the proper conditions are fulfilled. We shall find that this text suggests some of the most important and vital truths connected with the Christian walk.

THE NATURE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

The Christian life is a walk, and a walk suggests at least four things. It presupposes *Life*. Dead people do not walk, and it is impossible to think of a Christian "walking" until we realise that he possesses spiritual life in order to enable him to do so. "He that hath the Son hath life," and when we receive into our hearts by faith the life of God in Christ we have the certain guarantee of our Christian walk.

A walk also suggests *Activity*. Walking is the expression and proof of life. We know that peo-

ple are alive when we see them walking. The Christian walk means activity in Christ and for Him. The life is not to be quiescent, but energetic. The proof of our possession of life lies in our Christian walk.

A walk also involves *Progress*. It is impossible to think of a walk without at once imagining the idea of movement and progress. In the same way the various references in Holy Scripture to the Christian walk assume that the believer is making progress, that he has gone forward in the Christian life, that his experience is deepening, that his knowledge of his Lord is more real and precious, that his character is more stable and his work more and more influential.

Then, too, the Christian walk implies a *Destination*. Properly understood, a walk is much more than a mere aimless saunter; it has a definite starting-point, and an equally definite goal. This is also the case with the Christian walk. There is an aim, an object, a purpose in it. The starting point is earth, the goal is Heaven. The Christian hastes on from Grace to Glory.

The Christian walk is not a solitary one, for, as our text suggests, there is a companionship in it; the Christian does not go alone. This is true with reference to our fellow-Christians, and the New Testament is very clear in its emphasis on Christian love and fellowship. A purely individ-

ualistic Christian is no Christian at all. A solitary Christian is an utter misnomer. No one can be a New Testament Christian apart from fellowship with other Christians. In this companionship there is joy and strength and inspiration, and truly to be a saint in the Bible meaning of that word requires an experience of "the Communion of Saints."

Our present topic, however, has to do, not with the companionship of Christians with Christians, but with the companionship of the believer with his God. This is the point of the prophet's word which heads the chapter. It is interesting to note the various prepositions that are found in Scripture connected with the Christian walk. "Walk *before* me" (Gen. xvii. 1). Abraham is called to sincerity, to live his life in the presence of God. "Ye shall walk *after* the Lord your God" (Deut. xiii. 4). The believer is also required to follow God in close, careful obedience. "As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye *in* Him" (Col. ii. 6). The believer is commanded to walk in union with his Lord. But highest of all we read of walking "humbly *with* God" (Mic. vi. 8). This is our highest and truest companionship, keeping step with God day by day.

The companionship of the believer with his God is more than ordinary friendship, it involves intimacy. Companionship would be possible with a

number walking together, but in this case, as our text reminds us, we have "two" walking together. It brings before us the great New Testament reality of fellowship with God; "truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John i. 3); "the fellowship of the Holy Ghost" (2 Cor. xiii. 14). The thought of fellowship with God is the mountain peak of present Christian privilege. There is nothing beyond it, for the simple reason that union and communion with God constitute the very purpose of the Incarnation of our Lord.

The ideas connected with human fellowship may help us to understand what is the meaning of true intimacy. It involves at least three things:—reciprocal knowledge; reciprocal love; reciprocal endeavour. When two people are really friends, they will ever be getting to know one another better; to love one another more deeply; and to work for one another more earnestly. We can easily realise what this means between the believer and God in all its unspeakable preciousness and power. Two men and two only, are recorded in the Old Testament as having walked with God—Enoch (Gen. v. 22) and Noah (Gen. vi. 9). Yet other servants of God doubtless had close fellowship with Him, for we are told of Moses that "God knew him face to face" (Deut. xxxiv. 10).

Enoch and Noah seem also to represent the two

aspects of the Christian life—the inner and the outer; character and conduct; contemplation and its action. It is not quite correct to imagine Enoch as living entirely the life of adoration, contemplation and communion, for we are told (Jude 14, 15) of his faithful testimony to the ungodly around him, and no one can be so faithful amidst surrounding idolatry and wickedness without experiencing opposition and real discipline of soul. In the case of Noah, however, there is no possible doubt about his being a man of affairs, a practical, hard-working servant of God who in the midst of his labours and testimony was nevertheless enabled to walk with God. It is impossible, therefore, for anyone to say that this walk with God is impracticable and beyond our power. What man has done, man can do, for the grace of God is the same in all ages and the Lord is "rich unto all that call upon Him."

One man and one man only in the Old Testament has the great privilege of being called "the Friend of God" (2 Chron. xx. 7; Isa. xli. 8; James ii. 23); and to this very day in the Arabian desert Abraham is spoken of as El Khalil, God's friend. But this very title is applied in the New Testament to all the Master's disciples: "I have called you friends" (John xv. 15), "Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you" (John xv. 14).

THE SECRET OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

How then can this life of walking with God be realised? Our text supplies the answer—"Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" We know how true this is in an earthly walk. The two friends must be agreed as to the time of starting, the direction of the walk, and also as to the topics of conversation.

In like manner, there must be "agreement" between God and the believer if there is to be a walk together. What, however, does it really mean for the believer and his God to "be agreed"? In the margin of the R. V. there is a very interesting reading—"Can two walk together, except they make an appointment?" A still closer rendering of the Hebrew would be, "Except they *meet* by appointment." In the proper interpretation of this word lies the secret of walking with God. The Hebrew root from which the word comes is used in connection with the Jewish Tabernacle, which it will be remembered is, literally, "the tent of *meeting*," and there are three passages in particular which suggest to us the secret of walking with God.

God met His people at the Mercy Seat. "There I will *meet* with thee" (Exodus xxv. 22). The Mercy Seat was in the Holy of Holies, and was approached only once a year by the High Priest

alone. He brought the blood of sacrifice with him, and sprinkled that blood in front of and upon the Mercy Seat; the Holy Ghost thus signifying that God and His people were now at peace, reconciled on the basis of sacrifice. The predominant thought of the Mercy Seat was that of propitiation, and in that propitiation God "met His people by appointment." For us to-day the spiritual meaning and antitype are found in the Cross of Christ. "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood" (Rom. iii. 25). God meets us by appointment at the Cross, and fellowship with Him is only possible on the basis of that sacrifice. This intimate connection of the believer with the Cross of Christ is not to be limited to the moment of conversion, or even to the elementary experiences of the Christian life. The death of Christ touches the Christian life at all points and at all times, and is concerned with the deepest and most mature experiences of the Christian soul. The teaching of the Apostle Paul (Rom. vi.; 2 Cor. v.) clearly connects the death of our Lord with the whole course of the Christian life. We are not only justified by His blood (Rom. v. 9), we are also sanctified thereby (Heb. xiii. 12). Never for an instant can we get away from or pass beyond the power of the propitiation of Calvary; it is there that God continues to meet with us day by day, and at this meeting place we have

the first part of the secret of a truly blessed walk with our Heavenly Father.

God met His people at the Altar of Burnt Offering. "A continual offering . . . at the door of the tabernacle . . . where I will *meet* you" (Exodus xxix. 42). The Burnt Offering was offered in the outer court of the Tabernacle morning by morning, and it was one of the sacrifices that were wholly consumed on the altar. The predominant spiritual meaning was not propitiation, though that element was included, but consecration. It implied the whole-hearted devotion and complete surrender of the offerer; as his gift was wholly consumed by fire, so his life was to be wholly dedicated to God. The Christian counterpart of this is very clear in the New Testament. As propitiation is seen in Rom. iii. 25, so consecration is seen in Rom. xii. 1, "I beseech you therefore by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice." In this whole-hearted surrender of the soul God meets with us, and we are thereby enabled to walk with Him.

It is possible that one secret of our failure to walk with God lies just at this point. We have accepted our Lord as the propitiation, but we have not surrendered wholly to Him as our Master and Lord; and yet He can never be wholly our Saviour unless He is also our Lord. The woman with the issue of blood attempted to obtain the blessing of

healing without giving Jesus Christ credit in open testimony and confession, and in like manner it would seem as if many professed Christians desired to obtain the benefits of Calvary without yielding their lives to Him in grateful devotion as their Master and Lord. But as long as this is the case, there can be no walking with God. He must be Lord of all if we are to have fellowship with Him. Whenever, therefore, we are prepared to say from the heart, "Here we offer and present unto Thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy and living sacrifice unto Thee," we shall find that He will meet with us and enable us to walk step by step in holy, happy and helpful fellowship with Him.

God met His people at the Altar of Incense. "Thou shalt make it a perfume . . . and put of it before the testimony in the tabernacle . . . where I will *meet* with thee," (Exod. xxx. 35, 36). This Altar was in the Holy Place of the Tabernacle, and was used day by day for the daily offering of incense (Luke i. 9). We can see the spiritual meaning of it in the Psalmist's words, "Let my prayer be set forth before Thee as the incense" (Psalm cxli. 2). The underlying thought is that of worship and communion, for as the incense rose day by day in the Tabernacle, so the people of Israel were to worship and commune with their God day by day. The spiritual mean-

ing for us is evident: we are called to daily communion with God through prayer and His Word. In prayer the soul speaks to God; in the Bible God speaks to the soul, and this is another of the meeting places with God. God meets us by appointment in daily worship and spiritual communion.

May not the lack of this be another explanation of our failure to walk with God? The Christian life is absolutely impossible apart from a season of daily private prayer and Bible meditation. We must have time to speak to God and to allow God to speak to us. The great rush, pressure and complexity of modern life, so far from giving us any excuse for not having our time of private devotion, is itself the very reason why we should make this opportunity for private communion the very centre and strength of daily living. And if it should be urged that many have no time for it, the reply is as clear as it is imperative, we must do that easiest of all things—we must *make* time. It is simply astonishing how easy it is to make times. Even in the busiest life it is remarkable what five minutes of prayer and Bible meditation will do in enabling the soul to meet with God, and strengthen it for walk throughout the day. Scripture is full of the clearest illustrations of the truth of Tennyson's words, that "solitude is the mother-country of the strong." And yet it is not really

a solitude, for it is a time spent in the presence of God, waiting upon Him for guidance, wisdom, strength and blessing. This everyday experience of private prayer and meditation is at the root of all genuine Christian life. It is only as we "wait upon the Lord" that we shall "renew our strength" (Isa. xl. 31) and glorify God day by day.

These are the three conditions of walking with God. He meets us by appointment in the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ; in the complete consecration of ourselves to Him; and in daily communion with Him through prayer and our Bible. The order of these three in the book of Exodus is very noteworthy: it exactly agrees with the order of Christian experience, and when each is considered separately and all three are taken in their order, we learn the blessed secret of how to walk with God.

Shall we not therefore *make* an appointment with God from this moment? There is no special place of meeting now, only a special Person through Whom we come. Christ our Saviour and our Lord is willing to make an appointment with us, if only we are willing to respond to Him, and definitely arrange to meet with Him day by day.

Shall we not also take care to *keep* this appointment? How trying it is when through neglect people fail to keep their appointments with busy

professional men! And what must God think of the failure of His children to keep their appointment with Him? How often at special services and meetings and conventions, or in some solemn or exceptional experience of daily life, we have made an appointment with God and then we have failed to keep it! No wonder that our Christian life is poor and failing; no wonder that our influence is weak and almost worthless; no wonder that God has no definite testimony from our life. What is needed above all things is that we should regard our appointment with God as the most sacred fact of daily life. The act will soon become a habit; and the habit will express itself in an attitude, until at length it will be of the very essence of our spiritual life day by day to meet with God. And thus our life will deepen in experience, ripen in blessing, widen in influence, and we shall go from strength to strength until at last the glorious promise is fulfilled, "They shall walk with Me in white."

"Then all is peace and light,
This soul within.
Then I shall walk with Thee,
The loved Unseen.
Leaning on Thee, my God;
Guided along the road,
Nothing between."