

In His Steps

Hamilton Smith.

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"Follow His steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth: Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously. " (1 Peter 2: 21-23).

"Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." (Matt. 11: 29, 30).

While the Lord Jesus Christ is the great theme of all Scripture, yet every several portion presents some special aspect of His Person or work. The above passages bring before us, very blessedly, the lowly grace that marked His pathway of suffering as the perfectly subject Man.

In one passage we are exhorted by the Apostle Peter to follow His steps: in the other, believers are invited by the Lord, Himself, to learn of Him. Good for each one to heed the exhortation and to respond to the gracious invitation. To do so however, we need to reverently enquire: What are His steps that we are exhorted to follow? and, What is it that the Lord would have us to learn of Him?

1 "HIS STEPS" (1 Peter 2: 21-23.)

First, let us listen to the exhortation of the Apostle. There came a day in the history of Peter when the Lord had said to His restored disciple, "Follow Me" (John 21: 19). Now the Apostle passes on these words to each one of us, as he says, "Follow His steps." In Christendom, and even by true believers, the words "Follow His steps" are often used in a vague and loose way. Even unconverted people will seize upon these words, misusing them to convey the false thought that if men carry out the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount they will be very good Christians, and thereby secure the salvation of their souls. Probably those who speak thus lightly about following His steps, would be at a loss to turn to the Scripture where the exhortation is found, and even so would prefer their own interpretation of the words rather than enquire the meaning with which they are used by the Holy Spirit.

Turning to the passage in which the exhortation occurs, we at once learn from the context that these words are addressed to believers — those of whom the Apostle can say that they have received the end of their faith even the salvation of their souls (1 Peter 1: 9). It is evident then that in this Scripture there is no exhortation to a sinner to follow His steps in order to obtain salvation. Apart from the sacrificial death of Christ, and faith in His precious blood, there can be no salvation for a helpless sinner. In Scripture God never uses "His steps" to set aside *His work*.

The exhortation to "follow His steps" is then addressed to believers, and moreover, is used with a very distinct meaning. What this meaning is we learn from the four distinct steps that are set before us. It is evident that a great deal that the Lord did in His marvellous life we cannot, and are not asked to, do. He did mighty works, even to raising the dead; He spake as never man spake. In these ways we are

not exhorted to follow His steps. The four steps we are exhorted to follow are possible for all believers, from the youngest to the oldest.

First, we are reminded that He "did no sin." We know that He went about doing good; and, in this same Epistle we are exhorted, again and again, to "good works," and to "do well". Here, however, the exhortation takes a negative form; we are to follow His steps in this respect that He did no sin. Whatever happens, whatever circumstances may arise, whatever rebuffs we may have to meet, whatever wrongs we may have to suffer, whatever insults we may have to endure, *we are to do no sin*. It is comparatively easy to do good as a benefactor, meeting the needs of others; but, seeing we have the flesh in us, it is at times difficult to do no sin. It is a greater thing to do no sin in trying circumstances than to do good in easy ones. The Lord was perfect in all circumstances, and, whatever the circumstances we have to meet, our first care should be to follow His steps, and maintain His character, in this respect, that we do no sin. It is better to suffer wrong than sin; better to lose your coat than let go the character of Christ.

Secondly, we read, "neither was guile found in His mouth." However sorely tried by wicked men, no question that He asked, no answer that He gave, no word that fell from His lips, was ever marred by any trace of guile. Alas! with us, at times, malice and envy may lurk behind words that are "smoother than butter" and "softer than oil." With Him no evil motive was ever hidden under fair speech. Guile lurked behind the apparently innocent question of the religious Pharisees when they asked "Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not?" for we read they were seeking to "entangle Him in His talk" (Matt. 22: 15-18). With the flesh in us it is all too possible to seek to entangle one another with smooth speech and innocent looking questions. Alas! we can even covertly attack one another in the very words we address to God in public prayer. How good then, and necessary the exhortation to follow in His steps of the One in whom no guile was found in His mouth.

Thirdly, we are reminded that the Lord was One, "Who when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not." In the presence of insults, false accusation, and malicious charges, He remained silent. When falsely accused before the Jewish Council, He "held His peace." To the accusations of the Jews, in the presence of Pilate, "He answered nothing." To Pilate, himself, "He answered never a word." The mocking Herod may question Him in many words, "but He answered him nothing" (Matt. 26: 63; Matt. 27: 12, 14; Luke 23: 9). How good for us to follow in His steps and, in the presence of the malicious words of men, come from what quarter they may, to keep silence. From other Scriptures it is clear that the Christian may "entreat," "exhort," and even "rebuke," but never is he to revile or threaten.

Fourthly, He "committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously." To do no sin, to speak no guile, to keep silence in the presence of malicious words, have a negative character. This last step is positive. If we keep silence in the presence of insults, it is not that there is no answer to evil and malice, but rather that the answer is left with God. We are never to attempt to take vengeance upon the wrongdoer. God retains all vengeance in His own hands. He has said, "*Vengeance belongeth unto Me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge His people*" (Hebrews 10: 30). Our part then is to follow in the steps of the Lord Jesus, and in the presence of insults to commit ourselves unto Him that judgeth righteously, remembering that word which says, "Avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine: I will repay saith the Lord" (Rom. 12: 19). Again we may recall the words of the prophet, "Jehovah is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him. It is good that one should both wait, *and that in silence*, for the salvation of Jehovah" (Lam. 3: 24-26).

Here then we have four steps, taken in perfection by the Lord, that we are exhorted to follow. In all these steps there is no word as to ministry, or any form of service, that would make any show in this world, or bring us into prominence amongst the people of God. This being so we might thoughtlessly say, as we read these exhortations, that to do no evil, speak no guile, to keep silence in the presence of insults, and commit oneself to God, does not seem after all very much, and is a little disappointing. If, however, we put these things into practice, and follow His steps it will assuredly be found that our brethren *will not be disappointed in us*. Could we but take these steps others would see in us the most wonderful sight that can be seen in this world — they would see A CHRIST-LIKE MAN.

God forbid that we should belittle true service for Christ, but let us not forget that we may travel world-wide in service, and preach to thousands, and our names be well known in religious circles, and our service duly recorded in religious papers, and yet all be of little account in God's sight, if these four steps are lacking. Let us remember that we may speak with the tongues of angels and yet be nothing. So that, in the day to come it is possible that a thousand of our fine sermons, on which perhaps we prided ourselves, and for which our brethren may have praised us, will be found to be but dust and ashes, while some little bit of Christ in our lives, which we may have entirely forgotten, will shine out in all its beauty and receive its bright reward. Thus these steps may not take us into the public gaze to-day, but they will take us far into the Kingdom glories in the day to come. It is a word we do well to remember, "Many that are first shall be last; and the last first" (Mark 10: 31).

2. "LEARN OF ME" (Matthew 11: 29, 30.)

It will greatly help us to carry out the Apostle's exhortation to "follow His steps" if we heed the Lord's own words, "Learn of Me." To learn of the Lord, we must "*Consider Him* that endured such contradiction of sinners."

In the early chapters of the Gospel of Matthew we see the Lord in the midst of Israel, on every hand dispensing grace and power in relieving men of every pressure under which they are found. He healed the sick, fed the hungry, clothed the naked, delivered from the power of Satan, forgave sins, and raised the dead. In result men fought against Him without a cause, rewarded Him evil for good and hatred for love (Psalm 109: 5). They laughed him to scorn; they said, "He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils," and He was "a gluttonous man and a winebibber" (Matt. 9: 20, 34; Matt. 11: 19).

In the presence of the contradiction of sinners, of the hatred that spurned His love, and the evil that scorned His goodness, how did He act? In the presence of all this enmity we read, that He gave Himself unto prayer (Psalm 109: 4). Instead of turning upon His opposers and reviling those that reviled Him, He turned to God in prayer and committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously.

In scorn, neglect, reviling,
Thy patient grace stood firm:
Man's malice unavailing
To move Thy heart to haste.

Thus in this wonderful scene described in Matthew 11, which sums up the effect of His mighty works in the midst of Israel, we are permitted to see how the Lord acts when He is despised and rejected of men. We see Him turning to the Father in prayer, and we hear Him say, "even so Father: for so it seemed good in Thy sight." He submits entirely to the Father's will and takes everything from His hand. Then, with Himself before us as the perfect Example, we hear Him say to us,

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of Me. "

In Scripture the "yoke" is ever a figure of submission to the will of another. From the beginning to the end of His wonderful path through this world, the Lord, as the perfect Man, was here for the will of the Father. Coming into the world, He could say, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God." Passing through the world he could say, "I came down from heaven not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me", and again, He says, "I do always those things that please Him." Going out of the world, He could say, in view of the cross, "Not My will but Thine be done" (Heb. 10: 9, John 5: 38; John 8: 29; Luke 22: 42).

Our little circumstances, however painful and trying at times, are as nothing compared with those the Lord had to face. But whatever they may be we are exhorted to take the Lord's yoke by quietly submitting to what the Father allows.

Moreover, the Lord says, "Learn of Me: for I am meek and lowly in heart." He was not only meek and lowly in manner, but He was "meek and lowly *in heart*." The right manner that men can see is comparatively easy to put on, but the right condition of heart, that the Lord alone can see, can only result from turning to the Lord in prayer and submitting to the Father's will. Naturally we are neither meek nor lowly. Instead of meekly giving way to others we assert ourselves; instead of having low thoughts of self we are naturally prone to self-importance. To correct all these natural tendencies of the flesh the Lord engages us with Himself, as He says, "Learn of Me." As we gaze upon Him, and admire these lovely qualities, we insensibly become changed into His image. We become morally like the One we admire. Alas! the fact that oftentimes we are so little like Him tells, only too plainly, how little we have Himself before our souls — how little we learn of Him.

Taking His yoke and learning of Him we shall find rest unto our souls. Dwelling upon the trying circumstances we may have to meet, fretting our souls over the insults that may be flung at us, the betrayal of false friends, the malice of jealous persons, will bring no rest to the soul. Submitting to what the Father allows and catching the beautiful spirit of Christ, in all its meekness and lowliness, as we learn of Him, we shall enjoy the rest of spirit that was ever the portion of the Lord in a world of unrest.

Moreover, if we take His yoke, and thus submit to the Father's will we shall find that His yoke is easy and His burden light. For in following His steps, doing no sin, speaking without guile, keeping silence in the presence of insults, and committing ourselves to God, we shall have His support as yoked with Him in submission to the Father's will. And with *His support*, and in fellowship with Him, we shall find how true are His words,

"My yoke is easy, and My burden is light."

Thus, as we read these Scriptures, we are made conscious that Peter does not exhort us to take impossible steps; and the Lord does not ask us to learn impossible lessons.

Peter exhorts us,

To do no sin,

To use no guile,

To be silent in the presence of insults, and

To commit ourselves to GOD.

The Lord asks us to learn of Him, in subjection to the Father's will, in meekness that thinks of others, and lowliness that does not think of self.

We wonder at Thy lowly mind
And fain would like Thee be
And all our rest and pleasure find
In learning Lord, of Thee.