***The Gospel from the Heart***

**The Gospel Difference, 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16 April 23, 2023**

***And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men,   
but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.***

**1 Thessalonians 2:13**

**The gospel arrives**

*You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. 2 We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition. 3 For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. 4 On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. 5 You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. 6 We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else.*

*As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, 7 but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. 8 We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. 9 Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.*

*10 You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. 11 For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children,   
12 encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.*

*13 And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. 14 For you, brothers, became imitators of God’s churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, 15 who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men 16 in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last.*

1 Thessalonians 2

1. The gospel has always faced oppposition

2. The gospel has always been incarnational

3. About wrath – Paul’s point is that while God’s wrath is present (see Romans 1:18-25), believers will be saved from God’s final wrath (1 Thessalonians 5:9)

Diagram

Description automatically generated

**In defense of the mission (but always ask who the “we” is)**

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1 Thessalonians 2

1. An incarnational gospel must come from pure motives

2. An incarnational gospel knows who does the entrusting (Paul uses this same language in   
Romans 3:2; Galatians 2:7; Titus 1:3; 1 Timothy 1:11)

3. An incarnational gospel shares lives and lightens burdens

**The pastor’s “testimony”**

*10 You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. 11 For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children,   
12 encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.*

1 Thessalonians 2

1. God is watching

2. The pastor has an “along side” kind of ministry

3. Walking worthy (maybe “reverently” is better) is, according to 1 Colossians 9-14 a matter of:  
 -- bearing fruit in every good work

-- growing in the knowledge of God  
 -- being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might . . .  
 -- joyfully giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to share in the inheritance . . .   
 “For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom  
 of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

**The pastor’s success**

*13 And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. 14 For you, brothers, became imitators of God’s churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews,   
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1 Thessalonians 2 (see Spurgeon’s “Three Sights” sermon)

1. The pastor is continually thankful because the word of God is welcomed (see Genesis 3:1)

2. Accepting the word of God means \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (Matthew 7:13-27)

3. The word of God (the “sword of the Spirit” in Ephesians 6:17) is the Spirit’s tool for “energizing”

4. One sign of the Spirit’s work is that we share a “family likeness” with the church persecuted

**Resources for reading 1 Thessalonians**

The poster for 1 Thessalonians can be found at [*bibleproject.com*](file:///I:\Lent%202023\bibleproject.com)

Doug’s favorite 1 Thessalonians commentaries include   
Charles Wannamaker’s NIGTC volume (Eerdmans, 1990)  
Hendricksen’s *Expository Commentary* (Baker, 1955)  
Robert Thomas’ volume in *Expositors’ Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 1981)

John MacArthur has a very interesting sermon, “The Ideal Church” at [*https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/1317A*](https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/1317A)

Spurgeon has an important sermon on this text at [*http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols31-33/chs1979.pdf*](http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols31-33/chs1979.pdf)

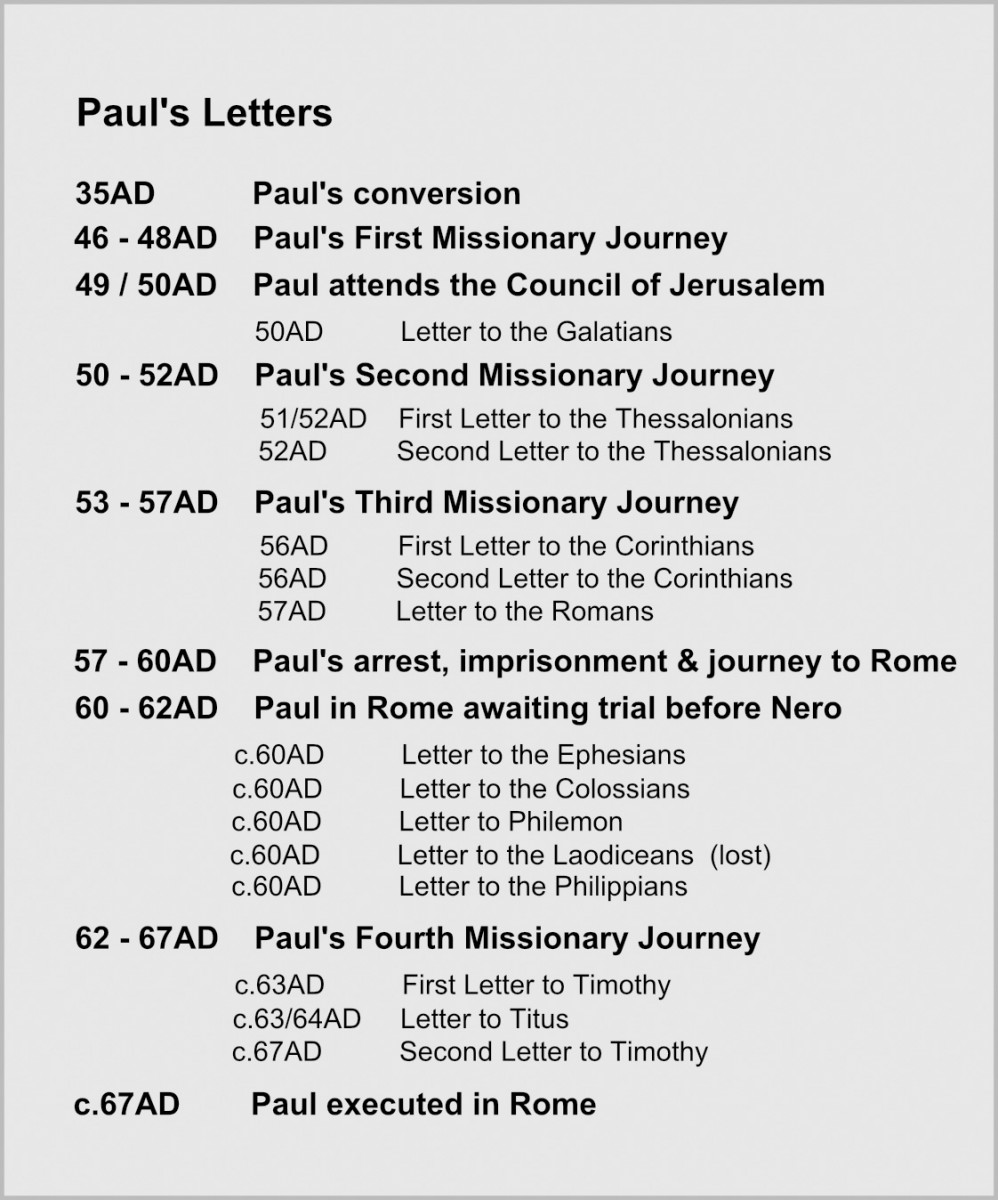
Alexander Maclaren has commentary on 1 Thessalonians 2:12 included below at [*https://www.preceptaustin.org/maclaren\_on\_1thessalonians#faith*](https://www.preceptaustin.org/maclaren_on_1thessalonians%23faith)

Thomas Schreiner has a wonderful essay on the optimism in 1 Thessalonians at [*http://www.sbts.edu/documents/tschreiner/3.3\_editorial.pdf*](http://www.sbts.edu/documents/tschreiner/3.3_editorial.pdf)

For a Puritan sermon on the 2:16, I recommend Jonathan Edward’s sermon at [*https://www.biblebb.com/files/edwards/uttermost.htm*](https://www.biblebb.com/files/edwards/uttermost.htm)

R. M. McCheyne has a wonderful short piece on this text at [*https://www.monergism.com/gospel-not-word-power-1-thessalonians-15*](https://www.monergism.com/gospel-not-word-power-1-thessalonians-15)

John Piper has two sermons on this text at [*http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary  
/Sermons/ByScripture/42/507\_On\_Sharing\_Your\_Own\_Soul/*](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/42/507_On_Sharing_Your_Own_Soul/%20%20)  and [*https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/how-to-receive-the-word-of-man-as-the-word-of-god*](https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/how-to-receive-the-word-of-man-as-the-word-of-god)



**THREE SIGHTS WORTH SEEING**

NO. 1979

A SERMON DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, MARCH 24, 1887,

*BY C. H. SPURGEON,*

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

at [*http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols31-33/chs1979.pdf*](http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols31-33/chs1979.pdf)

*“For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when you received the word of God which*

*you heard of us, you received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God,*

*which effectually works also in you that believe. For you, brethren, became followers of the*

*churches of God which in Judea are in Christ Jesus: for you also suffered like*

*things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews.”*

***1 Thessalonians 2:13, 14.***

PAUL seems very much at home when he is writing to the church at Thessalonica. In his letters to

that favored people he unveils his inmost feelings. He is rather apt to do so when he feels himself quite

at ease, for Paul is by no means a man shut up within himself, who is never at home to anyone. When he

is battling with an ungrateful people he keeps himself to sharp words and strong arguments, but when he

is writing to a loving, attached, affectionate church, he lets them have the key of his heart, and he lays

bare before them his secret emotions. I feel as if we were interviewing Paul tonight—as if we were all

sitting in a room with him, and Silas, and Timothy, and were hearing their private conversation. We

have come to a roundtable conference with them, and we are listening to their talk about the ministry

which God had committed to them. Even in these two verses we hear of how these holy preachers loved

the gospel, told out the gospel, and saw that gospel take hold of their hearers’ hearts.

They were not obliged to be reticent about their own conduct or their experience with the Thessalonian

friends; they were able to tell the story of their transactions with the church of Thessalonica from

the very beginning. It is a happy thing to be the pastor of a church where one may wear his heart upon

his sleeve. In certain positions prudence demands that we keep ourselves to ourselves until we know

more of the character of those who surround us. This is by no means pleasant; indeed it is a painful thing

to go through life like a man in armor, who scarcely dares to move a single plate of steel, lest somebody

should wound him in an unguarded place. One is glad to know that on the face of this earth there is a

church where the minister feels himself as much at home as a brother among brethren, and as safe as a

father among his sons, since he is not afraid of being misunderstood. It is my joy that for many years I

have found such a place of peace, so that I can say with the Shunammite, “I dwell among my own people.”

To return to our text; we find the apostle at home, telling out his thoughts in the freest manner. Indeed,

he seems to me to show us three sights of the most interesting kind, which it will be pleasing and

profitable for us to consider with care. I shall try to speak upon these three things, one after the other.

The first is, *ministers giving thanks*. “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing.” Then we

have the cause of it, which brings up a second beautiful sight, namely, *hearers receiving the word*. Paul

speaks of them thus, “When you received the word of God which you heard of us, you received it not as

the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually works also in you that believe.”

In these words we find a window into the heart of the Thessalonian Christians, and what we see is like a

cabinet of jewels. Then we have a third thing which is exceedingly interesting, namely, *new converts*

*exhibiting the family likeness,* turning out to be very like the believers of older churches. Born many

miles away from Judea, with a sea dividing them from the first country where the gospel was preached,

yet these Thessalonian Gentiles, when converted, looked wonderfully like the converts from among the

Jews—“For you, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judea are in Christ Jesus:

for you also have suffered like things from your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews.”

**I.** To begin, then, we are asked out to a little social party. We are placed in a corner of a cozy room

where we have license and favor to gaze upon MINISTERS GIVING THANKS.

Paul, Silas, and Timothy make up a little meeting. No doubt the Lord is with them, for they form

what He has made a quorum. They are within the number to which the promise is made, “Where two or

three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.” These three godly ministers

are holding what, if I use a Greek word, I may call a holy eucharistical service—a service of thanksgiving.

“For this cause also thank we God without ceasing.” It is a pleasant sight to see anybody thanking

God, for the air is heavy with the hum of murmuring, and the roads are dusty with complaints and

lamentations. It is a delightful vision to see hard-working, earnest ministers of Christ met together and

occupying their time with thanksgiving, for many waste their hours in speculations, doubts, and discussions.

Let us turn aside and look into their smiling faces! It will do us good to see who these good men

were, and how they came to be in this thankful condition.

And first, I would remark that *this thankfulness of theirs followed upon sore travail*. It is of no use

for you to say, “I shall thank God for a harvest,” if you neither plow nor sow. You will have no harvest

without labor and patience. “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy,” but if there is no sowing and no

tears there is no promise of any kind of reaping. I have known young preachers envy those who have

had many converts, and I do not wonder that they should, but if they themselves desire to be greatly useful

and successful, they must go the same way to work that others have done. In the cause and kingdom

of Christ, although the race is not to the swift, it certainly is not to the sluggish, and although salvation is

not of him that wills nor of him that runs, it certainly is not of him that does not will and does not run.

We may sit and sigh as long as we like, but we shall see no result from lethargy. Dead bees make no

honey either in the land of grace or of nature. Neither is anything worked by merely tucking up your

sleeves, and making a brave show. We may plot and we may plan, we may propose and we may expect,

but expectations and proposals will fall to the ground like apple-blossoms that have never knit unless we

stir ourselves up in the name of God, and throw all the strength we have into the work of faith and labor

of love. We shall fail unless we cry for much more strength than nature will yield us. With a vehemence

that will not take a denial, we must plead with the Lord until we prevail, for in this matter “the kingdom

of heaven suffers violence and the violent take it by force.” Yes, Paul, and Silas, and Timothy, you

would not be sitting together thanking God, if you had not for many a day put your shoulders to the

wheel. If you had not labored night and day, if you had not exercised much labor and travail, and been

willing to impart to the people, not only the gospel, but even your own lives also, you would never have

rejoiced together in the way you have described. Ministers giving thanks to God are ministers who have

worked.

*And this work of theirs had been backed by holy living,* for the apostle is bold to declare, “You are

witnesses and God also, how holily and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you that

believe.” Brethren, we shall not win success unless we hunt for it by careful lives. You wish to see your

Sunday school class converted. You are anxious to be blessed in your tract-district. You want to see that

little mission hall crowded, and souls converted. Begin by looking to your own life. As the man is, depend

upon it, so will his life-work be. There will not come out of any one of us that which is not in us.

You must fill the pitcher, or you cannot go round and fill the cups of those who thirstily ask you for water.

That which you would impart of grace or life must be in yourself first; and when God has worked it

in you, then it shall be yours to work out. The water of life must be placed in you to be a well of living

water, springing up, and then the word shall be fulfilled in you—“Out of his belly shall flow rivers of

living water.” Personal piety is the backbone of success in the service of God. You can be sure of that.

Our mistakes and blunders in the work itself usually originate in faults in the closet, faults in the family,

faults in our own souls. If we were better, our works would be better. If we walk contrary to God, He

will walk contrary to us.

We cannot be too careful of our conduct if we aspire to be used of the Lord. Though the Lord is jealous

of all His servants, He is especially jealous of those whom He honors in service. “Be you clean that

bear the vessels of the Lord.” That which He might have passed over in one of His common servants He

will not wink at in those whom He largely blesses. Therefore, dear friends, let us remember that rejoicing

servants of God must be holy servants of God. They shall not give thanks for the purity of their people

unless they have set a holy example themselves. This renders all work for Christ a very solemn

thing. May we always think it so, and never go to it in a trifling spirit, but with many cries to the Holy

One of Israel that He would make and keep us clean and bright as vessels fit for the Master’s use!

You see, dear friends, that these three brethren, who met together, and were thanking God, were men

who had worked, and who had lived holily, but further notice that, when they congratulated each other,

*this mode of expressing their joy by thankfulness prevented their falling into anything like self-laudation*.

Neither Paul, nor Silas, nor Timothy, had anything whereof to glory, and they did not meet together either

for self-glorification, or for mutual admiration. They glorified God, and thanked Him without ceasing.

Let us copy the example of these holy men. Brother, be much in thanking the Lord. If you have had,

one soul converted by your teaching, thank God. If in your class in the Sabbath school, or if in your own

family at home, you have had one conversion, thank God. I am afraid that we fail in thankfulness. We

pray for blessings, and forget to praise for them. We are not grateful enough. I was chiding myself last

Tuesday. I think that I selected twenty-eight persons whom I could venture to propose for church fellowship out of many who came. What a number it was! I felt when the day was over very weary with the blessed service, and then I chided myself that I had permitted weariness to come in when I should ratherhave been praising and blessing God. I could not help my weakness, and yet I thought my gratitude

ought to have borne me above it. Oh, I recollect the day when I would have given my eyes—yes, given

my head—for twenty-eight converts! I feel that I would sacrifice my all for such a blessing even now.

To think that God should send so many in one week, and give me evidence that there are plenty more to

follow! Was not this a delight? They keep coming to confess Christ in great numbers still. We ought to

be very joyful for this. The whole church should bless God for so many, and pray for more. If it were

one soul saved by twenty years’ work, we ought to feel that we could dance for joy, and count the service

to be as nothing, but hundreds added to the church should carry us up to the third heaven of delight.

As Jacob forgot all his toils when at last he could call the beloved Rachel his own, so should we count

nothing hard, laborious, or trying, so long as souls are saved. Oh, to bring souls to God! Whenever we

think of it, or see it done, let us say, like these three holy men, “For this cause also thank we God without

ceasing.”

Notice that *this thankfulness was of a social kind*. “Thank *we* God.” They all joined in it. Why, if

there is a soul saved anywhere, we ought all to thank God for it! I hope that over at Walworth Road this

week there may be some brought to Christ by their special meetings, and if they are so brought, glory be

to God. What does it matter which church they join? We hear of God blessing Mr. Moody or somebody

else right away in America. Glory be to God for it! The success of any church is our success. It is all in

the family. Let us praise God for it. But some are accustomed to look with a rather jealous eye at God’s

blessing other denominations, or other preachers. Let us fight against this spirit. O brethren, those of us

who have had the most of God’s blessing, what a mercy it would be if we were cut out altogether by better

and more useful men! Let our star cease to shine if brighter stars will but shine, and more souls see

the blessed light. Do not those of you whom God has blessed feel that you would gladly get out of the

way, and leave a clear road for somebody else, if the Lord would use them more than you? If you do not

feel so, I am afraid that the Master will put you out of the way because you are not completely absorbed

in His glory. When we are up to the neck in consecration, we are willing to be made nothing of, if God

can be glorified thereby. When we cannot be content to see Christ glorified by others and ourselves laid

on the shelf, there is a little bit of self left, and we must try to get rid of it.

At any rate, let us rejoice with those that do rejoice, and triumph in the success of our brethren. Be it

ours to make joint-stock in praising God for all that He works by us all! What a sweet thing it would be

if we more often met together when God blessed us, and said, “For this cause we thank God”! We ought

all to join in the hallelujahs of the church over souls saved by grace. We must not waste our time in allotting the success to this man, or to that man. Let us at once give all the glory to God. One cries, “It was

Timothy that did it.” “Oh, no!” says another, “Silas is the man that brought me to Christ.” “Ah!” says

another, “but I like to hear Paul. He is the master preacher. That young Timothy—why, he is nothing,

and Silas is nowhere by the side of Paul.” Such comparisons are odious. This kind of talk is evil, for all

God’s servants belong to you all, and you must get all the good you can out of them, but to compare and

to contrast them is to trifle. Let ministers discourage such vain talk among their people by their hearty

love to each other. It is good for God’s servants to get together, and to make a common heap of their

spoils, and send up a joint thanksgiving for the joint results of their joint labor. “For this cause thank *we*

God without ceasing.” Yes, and we do, my brethren! I can see some here tonight who I know join with

me in thanksgiving, as I join heartily with them whenever I think of them. I will bless and praise God for

His exceeding mercy in saving souls by them, and by me, and by all His workers.

One thing more is to be noticed: *this was a continual thanksgiving day,* for the apostle says, “For this

cause also thank we God *without ceasing.”* Our gratitude to God should be as lasting as life, as constant

as the bounty to which it bears witness. Our American friends have one Thanksgiving Day in the year,

but it was Thanksgiving Day all the year round with Paul and Silas and Timothy when they thought of

the Thessalonians. They felt as it they never could leave off thanking God for the Thessalonians, for

they knew by sad experience that all churches were not of the same happy kind. There were those Corinthians, forever quarrelling and thus grieving the apostle. “Never mind,” he says, “we will thank God for the Thessalonians.” Oh, but there are those Galatians! They have gone off the line, bewitched by Judaizing teachers. They have wandered into “modern thought,” and left the old orthodox faith. “Yes,” says the apostle, “those Galatians are a burden to me, but then, blessed be God for the Thessalonians.” So I think we ought to bless God for those that are kept, for those that are true, and for those that are faithful,

and when our harp is made to hang upon the willows because of part of the work which is barren and

unfruitful, yet let us not cease to praise and bless the Lord our God for that part of the work which prospers.

Let us magnify Him for those that are brought to know His name. “For this cause also thank we

God without ceasing because you received the word of God.”

*This spirit of thanksgiving tends to make us stronger and stronger for labor in days to come*. Yes, let

us sing unto the Lord instead of sighing unto ourselves! Let us not rob Him of His revenue of praise

even in our most desponding moments. “Although my house is not so with God, yet has He made with

me an everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure.” What if Satan does not appear to fall from

heaven? What if the devils do not seem to be subject unto us? Yet let us rather rejoice because our

names are written in heaven. O child of God, fall back upon what the Lord has done, and this shall make

you encounter every difficulty with a brave heart! What the Lord has done is but a token of what He is

going to do. Let us hold the fort, and look for better times. Never let us dream of fainting or retreating.

Do not say, “I will give it up because of the Galatians.” No, but go at it again because of the Thessalonians.

Do not say, “I am worried and wearied with the Corinthians.” No, but with your heart full of joy,

persevere in your Master’s service, because many Thessalonians have received the word, not as the

word of man, but as the word of God. Hallelujah, there is still something to sing about! Bring out the

trumpets; we are not yet silenced, nor shall we be while the Lord lives. The walls of Jericho will be more

likely to fall before our trumpets than our trembling.

So I have painted for you an ancient interior—you can see those three good men singing together to

the praise of God as they think of their Thessalonian converts.

Ah, my hearers, you could make some of us very happy! If you gave your hearts to the Lord, how

you would cheer and comfort us! And some of you that do love the Lord would do us a world of good if

you would come and tell us what the Lord has done for your souls. If you have been blessed, do not hide

it. If you do, you will rob us of our wages, for our wages come to us very much through our knowing

that God has blessed our ministry. Think of this, and treat us fairly and kindly, even as we have sought

your good. I, for one, have had such weary times of wolf hunting that I should be heartily glad to have

the quiet joy of watching the young lambs, and noting the growth of the sheep.

Now we leave the ministers, and think of the people.

**II.** The second sight which we have to look at is, HEARERS RECEIVING THE WORD. Let us

keep close to the text. “When you received the word of God which you heard of us, you received it not

as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually works also in you that believe.”

Notice, first, *these people received the word of God*. They were willing to hear it, they were anxious

to hear it, they heard it, and they were attentive in the hearing of it. They lent a willing ear and a ready

mind. They did not quibble, and dispute, and question, but they received the word of God. Happy

preacher who has such people to deal with! If we have them not, let us work on till we gather them.

Whether they will hear or whether they will forbear, let us tell the people our Lord’s message. But if

God favors us with receptive hearers, let us be instant in season and out of season. A good bit of soil like

that ought to be most diligently plowed and sown. Thank God, there are, I trust, many here who have

received the word of God so far, that they are willing to learn, and anxious to know its meaning, and to

feel its power! Among you our labor is lightened by hope, and cheered with expectation.

But next, *these people had doubly received the word of God;* at least, the word is twice mentioned in

our version. “When you received the word of God which you heard of us, you received it.” In the Greek

those are two different words altogether. The second “received” might, perhaps, better be read “accepted.”

I do not think that I should be straining a point if I read it, “You welcomed it.” They first received it

by eagerly hearing it. They wanted to know what it was all about, they were attentive to it, and wanted

to understand it. When they had heard it they rejoiced, and said, “Oh, yes, yes, yes, this is the very thing

we want!” They embraced it. That word will do—they *embraced* it. They put their arms around it, and

would not let it go. They were hospitable to the gospel, and said, “Come in, you blessed of the Lord;

come and live in our hearts!” They assented and they consented to the word of the Lord. They first appreciated the gospel, and then they apprehended it by faith. They were like the man that was hungry in a

foreign land, and he could not make the people quite understand, but as soon as they brought an article

of food which he liked he fell to directly, and made them comprehend that he would be glad of more of

that sort of thing. By his hearty reception of what they brought, the hungry man said plainly, “Bring

some more of that.” So we have a people about us, thank God, that are looking out for the gospel! They

are always willing to hear it if men will but preach it, and when they do get it they mean business, and

feed upon the word with hearty appetite. How glad I am to feed men that will eat! It is a pleasure indeed.

The spiritually hungry welcome heavenly food, they take it into themselves, and receive it as the bread

their soul craves after. Oh, what a mercy it is when sermons are preached which feed souls, and souls

hear so as to feed thereon! It is a happy day when a full Christ and empty sinners meet. Now, I am persuaded, dear friends, that, if any of you do not know the gospel—really do not know it—and yet are

heavy of spirit and cannot rest, and are unhappy, it will be a very blessed thing for you to find out what

the gospel is. I am pretty sure that many of you are in such a condition that as soon as you really know

that the doctrine proclaimed to you is God’s gospel, you will receive it into your very souls, and say,

“There is none like it. That is the very thing we have been looking after all our lives.” I think I hear one

of you say, “I have been hunting after this for years. I did not know that there was anything like it, but it

suits me to a turn. It fits me as a key fits a lock; it enters every ward of the lock of my soul as if it were

made for me.” Brethren, I bear witness that when I received the gospel of Jesus Christ, it seemed to me

as if Jesus Christ had made the gospel on purpose for me, and for me only. If there had been nobody else

in the world, and Jesus had made a gospel for me only, it could not have been more adapted for me. His

gospel exactly suited that poor sinner who, on one snowy morning, looked to Him and was lightened.

My dear hearer, *you* will find Jesus the very Savior for you. “But I am an out-of-the-way sinner,” cries

one. Have you never heard of Him who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on those that are out

of the way? What a wonderful text that is for you—you out-of-the-way ones! He can have compassion

on those that are out of the way. There is a remedy in the gospel for your disease. For the particular

shape your malady has taken the Lord has a special eye. His Son, Jesus, has a plaster suited for your peculiar sore, a medicine adapted to your peculiar need. May the Holy Spirit bring you to receive it as

these Thessalonians did!

And then, if I may trouble you to look at the text again, you will notice that the word *“it”* is in italics,

and so is the word *“as.”* Let me read the text again, “When you received the word of God which

you heard of us, you received not the word of men.” You see I have left out the “it” and the “as” because

they are not really there, though they are correctly added by the translators as giving the meaning of the

apostle. Verbally they are not in the text. I take the sentence out of its connection, and say that *these*

*Thessalonians received not the word of men*. And I like them for that. Oh, but there were very learned

men in those days! When Paul was on the earth, and a little before his day, some of the greatest natural

minds that ever existed were in Greece teaching the people. Yet the Thessalonians were in such a state

that they received not the word of men. They did not listen to Plato, or accept Socrates, for there was a

something about them which made them hunger for more than the philosophers could bring them. God’s

elect are of that mind. You may know the Lord’s sheep by the fact that “a stranger they will not follow:

for they know not the voice of strangers.” They will not receive the word of man; it is too light, too

chaffy, too frothy for them. You may put it before them in the daintiest guise, illustrate it with poetry,

and prove it by the fictions of science, but they will not feed on such wind. They receive not the word of

men; they will not have it; they want something more substantial.

To come back to our translation, *they received not the gospel as the word of men*. In these days there

are some who receive the gospel, but they receive it as the word of men. This is their spirit—“Yes, I

know that such is the view that is held by Mr. Black, but there is another view held by Dr. White, and

another view is upheld by Professor Gray. All these different ‘views’ are supposed to be very much upon

a par.” Beloved friends, this is not our way; there is the truth of God, and there is a lie, and I want

you always to feel that there is a solemn difference between the true and the false, and that no lie is of

the truth. “Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God.” If one says, “Yes,” and

the other says, “No,” it cannot be that they are both true. Salvation is of grace, or else of works; it cannot

be of both. Salvation is the work of God or else of man; it cannot be a joint-stock-company affair. There

is truth, and there is error, and these are opposite the one to the other. Do not indulge yourselves in the

folly with which so many are duped—that truth may be error, and error may be truth; that black is white,

and white is black, and that there is a whitey-brown that goes in between, which is, perhaps, the best of

the whole lot.

There is an essential difference between man’s word and God’s word, and it is fatal to mistake the

one for the other. If you receive even the gospel as the word of man you cannot get the blessing out of it,

for the sweetness of the gospel lies in the confidence of our heart that this is the word of God. You fall

back upon Holy Scripture in the grief of an aching heart, but you cannot rest, however soft the pillow of

the promise may seem to be, till you can surely say, “I know that it is of God.” If you have even a shadow

of a doubt about it, comfort oozes out. The life of comfort flies before doubt, even as love is said to

fly out the window when want comes in the door. Prick the heart—yes, with but a needle’s point—and

life will go; and prick the heart of faith—yes, even with the smallest doubt, and the life of joy is gone!

The joy of faith, and the strength of faith, yes, and the life of faith, is gone when you distrust the word of

the Lord!

Are we then infallible? No, but the Book is. Do we infallibly understand the Book? No, but the Spirit

of God will teach us what He Himself means, and of those truths which He teaches us we get so firm a

grip that we say, “No, no; I am never going to argue about this any more! This is proved to my heart and

soul beyond all further question. It is woven into my experience. It has stamped itself on my consciousness. It has done that for me which no lie could do. This is the revelation of God, and I will die sooner than I will ever, by any action of mine, permit a doubt to be cast upon it.” Brethren, do you accept the word of God as Infallible? Thus have I learned the gospel of Christ. Have you learned it in this fashion? Then you have received the gospel aright, but not else.

To receive the gospel as the word of man is not to receive the gospel, but to receive it as a revelation

from God, true, sure, infallible, so as to risk your whole soul on it, and to feel that there is no risk—this

is to receive the gospel in truth. After this manner we receive it with the deepest reverence; not as a

thing that I am to judge, but as that which judges me; not as a matter of opinion, but as a sure truth with

which I must make my opinion agree. It makes all the difference whether we rule the truth or the truth

rules us. The reverent obedience of the understanding to the word of the Lord is a great part of sanctification.

To receive the gospel as the word of God is to receive it with strong assurance. Other things *may be*

true, but this *must be* true. Other things may be questioned, but this must be implicitly believed. This

gospel of Jesus Christ is of God as surely as you live, and you have not received it at all if you do not

know it to be the word of God.

It is to receive it with obedience, because it comes with authority; to say, “This I must yield to. Other

truths I may be master of, but this is master of me. Other truths I may or may not hold—they may not be

of sufficient importance for me to bow before them, but this truth has God Himself enshrined within it,

and therefore I cannot be disobedient to the heavenly vision.” With man’s statements we are men, but

before God’s truth we are converted into little children. Is this so with you?

This gospel, if it is received as the word of God, comes with power. Yes, do not let us be misunderstood;

the power we mean is by no means a common thing! It is not the force of persuasion, nor the energy

of rhetoric; it is divine power—the finger of God. There is still in the world a miraculous force—

the divine energy of the Holy Spirit. It does not give us to speak with tongues, neither do we hear it in

rushing, mighty wind, but it is as unmistakable to those who have it as if it did come with such extraordinary signs. Sometimes a truth has been borne in upon my soul—and I doubt not you can say the

same—with an inward evidence which is beyond all argument for force and certainty. Though it is not

logic, we are surer than if conquered by reasoning. We prefer it to the demonstrations of mathematics so

far as our own assurance is concerned. In my own case, I could not see, but I did more than see; my inner

soul without eyes beheld the essential principle of the truth. I did not touch it, and yet my inner soul

handled it, tasted it, fed on it. It went into the secret spring-head and well-spring of my being, and became

one of its first principles. If any man said that the Lord Jesus was not able to save, and that His

gospel was not true, I snapped my fingers at him. I could not stop to answer him, because he seemed to

be willfully denying self-evident fact, and there is no answering such folly. For a man to tell me that the

gospel is not true, when the Spirit seals it on my heart, is all in vain. He might as well tell me that there

was no light when I stood gazing on a landscape in the brightness of the sun, or assure me that there was

no such thing as air when the strong north wind was on my cheeks. He might as well tell me that there

was no nutriment in food when I had just lost my hunger, and felt refreshed by what I had eaten. There

are some things that we have no patience to argue about; we have done with discussion concerning

them.

If you do not know spiritual things, ask God to let you know them. But you are out of court as a witness;

you cannot prove a negative, nor can your negative disprove our positive. We cannot argue with

you who are dead in sin, and have not received as yet spiritual senses. What can you know? Why should

we dispute with the blind concerning colors? How can we discuss music with the deaf?

“Oh,” says one, “but I do not believe in your spiritual experience!” I did not say you did; on the contrary,

I expected you *not* to believe in it. But what does that prove? Why, only that you have no spiritual

perception! That you have not perceived spiritual things is true, but it is no proof that there are none to

perceive. The whole case is like that of the Irishman who tried to upset evidence by non-evidence. Four

witnesses saw him commit a murder. He pleaded that he was not guilty, and wished to establish his innocence

by producing forty persons who did not see him do it. Of what use would that have been? So, if

forty people declare that there is no power of the Holy Spirit going with the word, this only proves that

the forty people do not know what others do know. If there are four of us that do know it—well, we

shall not cease our witness. We receive God’s word as the word of God, because it comes to us with that

power which effectually works in them that believe. It works in us a horror of sin, a detestation of self confidence,and an aspiration after holy and heavenly things. It works in us love to God and good-will to men. It works in us aspirations after the divine. It works in us victory over evil from day to day, and

while it does that, the proof of it is within us. The witness and seal of the truth of the gospel are within

our own character and being, and we cannot therefore give up our confidence. People who have come to

this pass make glad their ministers. Paul, Silas, and Timothy are all happy men when surrounded by

hearers who have received the gospel in all its divine authority and power.

**III.** Now my time has gone, otherwise my third point would have been a very interesting one. These

three men are rejoicing in CONVERTS WHO ARE EXHIBITING A FAMILY LIKENESS.

I only call your attention to the fact that the apostle says, “You, brethren, became followers of the

churches of God which in Judea are in Christ Jesus.” Here are people converted in Judea, and they are of

a strongly Jewish type; quite another set of people over at Thessalonica become converted to Christ, and

though they are thoroughly of the Greek type, they are very much like the converts in Judea. They know

nothing about the law of Moses, they have been heathens, worshipping idols, and yet, when they are

converted, the strange thing is, that they are exceedingly like those Jews over yonder, to whom idolatry

was an abomination. Greek believers are like Hebrew believers. They have never spoken to one another,

and nobody has been there to tell them the peculiarities of Christians, and yet a family likeness is distinctly

visible. Were you never startled with this, that if, in the preaching of the gospel today, we were to

bring to the Lord Jesus a person of high rank, and another of the very lowest extraction, they have the

same experience, and upon the greatest of subjects they talk in the same way? “Oh, but,” you say, “They

pick up certain phrases.” No, no! They differ in speech; the likeness is in heart and character. I frequently

meet with converts who have not attended this place of worship more than half-a-dozen times, but

they have been converted, and when they come to tell the story of their inner life you would suppose that

they had been born and bred among us, and had learned all our ways, for though they do not use the

phrases which we use, yet they say the same things. The fact is, we are all alike lost and ruined, and we

are born again in the same way, and we find the Savior in the same way, and we rejoice in Him when we

do find Him after much the same fashion, and express ourselves very much after the same style. Believers

differ in many things, and yet they are alike in the main things. There are no two exactly alike in all

the family of God, and yet the likeness to the Elder Brother is to be seen more or less in each one.

It is to me one of the evidences of the truth and divine nature of the work of grace in the heart, that if

you take an African Khoikhoi in his village hut, and he is converted, and you take a university man, who

has won all the degrees of learning, and he is converted, yet you would not know the tribesman from the

Doctor when they begin to talk about the things of God. The Khoikhoi’s English may be broken, but his

theology is sound. The uneducated man’s words may limp, but his heart will leap. Ruin, redemption, and

regeneration are the chief subjects in every case. When I am talking sometimes with young converts, and

they put their statements oddly and ignorantly, I am reminded of Father Taylor, when he was getting old.

The old man sometimes lost the thread of his discourse, and whenever he did so, he used to say, “There,

I cannot find the end of that sentence, but I am bound for the kingdom! Brethren, I am bound for the

kingdom!” Off he went to something else, for though he could not complete the paragraph he was bound

for the kingdom. Some brethren and sisters cannot see to the end of their own experience, but they are

bound for the kingdom. They cannot put this and that together to make it ship-shape, but you can see

that they are bound for the kingdom. There is the same tear of repentance, the same glance of faith, the

same thrill of joy, the same song of confidence; each one according to his measure enjoys the same life,

if he is indeed bound for the kingdom. The babe is like the man, and the man reminds you of the babe.

We are one spirit in Christ Jesus.

I will not enlarge, except to say that it makes us sing for joy when we can see in ourselves a likeness

to the children of God. We, too, resemble the early saints in our experiences. Opposition and tribulation

come to us in our measure as they did to them. There are the same afflictions, the same persecutions, the

same trials, wherever the work of Christ goes on, but there is the same mighty God to carry on the work

of grace, and the same promises of grace to be fulfilled to every believer.

Dear friends, are you believers in the Lord Jesus Christ? If you are, joy and rejoice with me; but if

you are not, oh, how I wish you were! Whatever comforts of life you enjoy, you are missing the only

thing that makes life worth having. If you are not yet resting on Christ Jesus, you have not yet found out

the kernel of the nut. You are boring away at the hard shell of life, and unless you turn to Christ you will

die worrying and wearying over the shell and you will never taste the sweet kernel. If you did but know

our Lord Jesus, if you did but trust Him, if you did but find salvation in Him, then you would find that if

earth cannot be heaven, it can become marvelously like it. The earnest of our everlasting inheritance

may be enjoyed even here. Would God you would seek my Lord and Master, for if you seek Him He

will be found of you! What a pleasure it would be if everyone at this time would receive the gospel as

the word of God! Spirit of God, grant that it may be so, for Jesus’ sake! Amen.

‘Walk worthy of God.’ — [1 Thessalonians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/1%20Thess%202.12).  
Alexander Maclaren at [*https://www.preceptaustin.org/maclaren\_on\_1thessalonians#faith*](https://www.preceptaustin.org/maclaren_on_1thessalonians%23faith)

HERE we have the whole law of Christian conduct in a nutshell. There may be many detailed commandments, but they can all be deduced from this one.

We are lifted up above the region of petty prescriptions, and breathe a bracing mountain air. Instead of regulations, very many and very dry, we have a principle which needs thought and sympathy in order to apply it, and is to be carried out by the free action of our own judgments.

Now it is to be noticed that there are a good many other passages in the New Testament in which, in similar fashion, the whole sum of Christian conduct is reduced to a ‘walking worthy’ of some certain thing or other, and I have thought that it might aid in appreciating the many-sidedness and all-sufficiency of the great, principles into which Christianity crystallises the law of our life, if we just gather these together and set them before you consecutively.

They are these: we are told in our text to ‘walk worthy of God.’ Then again, we are enjoined, in other places, to ‘walk worthy of the Lord,’ who is Christ. Or again, ‘of the Gospel of Christ.’ Or again, ‘of the calling wherewith we were called.’ Or again, of the name of ‘saints.’ And if you put all these together, you will get many sides of one thought, the rule of Christian life as gathered into a single expression — correspondence with, and conformity to, a certain standard.

I. And first of all, we have this passage of my text, and the other one to which I have referred, ‘Walking worthy of the Lord,’ by whom we are to understand Christ. We may put these together and say that the whole sum of Christian duty lies in conformity to the character of a Divine Person with whom we have loving relations.

The Old Testament says: ‘Be ye holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.’ The New Testament says: ‘Be ye imitators of God, and walk in love.’ So then, whatever of flashing brightness and infinite profundity in that divine nature is far beyond our apprehension and grasp, there are in that divine nature elements — and those the best and divinest in it which it is perfectly within the power of every man to copy.

In there anything in God that is more Godlike than righteousness and love? And is there any difference in essence between a man’s righteousness and God’s; — between a man’s love and God’s? The same gases make combustion in the sun and on the earth, and the spectroscope tells you that it is so. The same radiant brightness that flames burning in the love, and flashes white in the purity of God, even that may be reproduced in man.

Love is one thing, an the universe over. Other elements of the bond that unites us to God are rather correspondent in us to what we find in Him Our concavity, so to speak, answers to His convexity; our hollowness to His fulness; our emptiness to His all-sufficiency. So our faith, for instance, lays hold upon His faithfulness, and our obedience grasps, and bows before, His commanding will But the love with which I lay hold of Him is like the love with which He lays hold on me; and righteousness and purity, howsoever different may be their accompaniments in an infinite and uncreated Nature from what they have in our limited and bounded and progressive being, in essence are one. So, ‘Be ye holy, for I am holy’; ‘Walk in the light as He is in the light,’ is the law available for all conduct; and the highest divine perfections, if I may speak of pre-eminence among them, are the imitable ones, whereby He becomes our Example and our Pattern.

Let no man say that such an injunction is vague or hopeless. You must have a perfect ideal if you are to live at all by an ideal. There cannot be any flaws in your pattern if the pattern is to be of any use. You aim at the stars, and if you do not hit them you may progressively approach them. We need absolute perfection to strain after, and one day — blessed be His name — we shall attain it. Try to walk worthy of God and you will find out how tight that precept grips, and how close it fits.

The love and the righteousness which are to become the law of our lives, are revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Whatever may sound impracticable in the injunction to imitate God assumes a more homely and possible shape when it becomes an injunction to follow Jesus. And just as that form of the precept tends to make the law of conformity to the divine nature more blessed and less hopelessly above us, so it makes the law of conformity to the ideal of goodness less cold and unsympathetic. It makes all the difference to our joyfulness and freedom whether we are trying to obey a law of duty, seen only too clearly to be binding, but also above our reach, or whether we have the law in a living Person whom we have learned to love. In the one case there stands upon a pedestal above us a cold perfection, white, complete, marble; in the other case there stands beside us a living law in pattern, a Brother, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh; whose band we can grasp; whose heart we can trust, and of whose help we can be sure. To say to me: ‘Follow the ideal of perfect righteousness,’ is to relegate me to a dreary, endless struggling; to say to me, ‘Follow your Brother, and be like your Father,’ is to bring warmth and hope and liberty into all my effort. The word that says, ‘Walk worthy of God,’ is a royal law, the perfect law of perfect freedom.

Again, when we say, ‘Walk worthy of God,’ we mean two things — one, ‘Do after His example,’ and the other, ‘Render back to Him what He deserves for what He has done to you.’ And so this law bids us measure, by the side of that great love that died on the Cross for us all, our poor imperfect returns of gratitude and of service. He has lavished all His treasure on you; what have you brought him back? He has given you the whole wealth of His tender pity, of His forgiving mercy, of His infinite goodness. Do you adequately repay such lavish love? Has He not ‘sown much and reaped little’ in all our hearts? Has He not poured out the fulness of His affection, and have we not answered Him with a few grudging drops squeezed from our hearts? Oh! brethren! ‘Walk worthy of the Lord,’ and neither dishonour Him by your conduct as professing children of His, nor affront Him by the wretched refuse and remnants of your devotion and service that you bring back to Him in response to His love to you.

II. Now a word about the next form of this all embracing precept.

The whole law of our Christian life may be gathered up in another correspondence, ‘Walk worthy of the Gospel’ ([Philippians 1:27](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Phil%201.27)), in a manner conformed to that great message of God’s love to us.

That covers substantially the same ground as we have’ already been going over, but it presents the same ideas in a different light. It presents the Gospel as a rule of conduct. Now people have always been apt to think of it more as a message of deliverance than as a practical guide, as we all need to make an effort to prevent our natural indolence and selfishness from making us forget that the Gospel is quite as much a rule of conduct as a message of pardon.

It is both by the same act. In the very facts on which our redemption depends lies the law of our lives.

What was Paul’s Gospel? According to Paul’s own definition of it, it was this: ‘How that Jesus Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures.’ And the message that I desire now to bring to all you professing Christians is this: Do not always be looking at Christ’s Cross only as your means of acceptance. Do not only be thinking of Christ’s Passion as that which has barred for you the gates of punishment, and has opened for you the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven. It has done all that; but if you are going to stop there you have only got hold of a very maimed and imperfect edition of the Gospel. The Cross is your pattern, as well as the anchor of your hope and the ground of your salvation, if it is anything at all to you. And it is not the ground of your salvation and the anchor of your hope unless it is your pattern. It is the one in exactly the same degree in which it is the other.

So all self-pleasing, all harsh insistence on your own claims, all neglect of suffering and sorrow and sin around you, comes under the lash of this condemnation: ‘They are not worthy of the Gospel.’

And all unforgivingness of spirit and of temper in individuals and in nations, in public and in private matters, that, too, is in flagrant contradiction to the principles that are taught on the Cross to which you say you look for your salvation. Have you got forgiveness, and are you going out from the presence-chamber of the King to take your brother by the throat, for the beggarly coppers that he owes you, and say: ‘Pay me what thou owest!’ when the Master has forgiven you all that great mountain of indebtedness which you owe Him? Oh, my brother! if Christian men and women would only learn to take away the scales from their eyes and souls; not looking at Christ’s Cross with less absolute trustfulness, as that by which all their salvation comes, but also learning to look at it as closely and habitually as yielding the pattern to which their lives should be conformed, and would let the heart-melting thankfulness which it evokes when gazed at as the ground of our hope prove itself true by its leading them to an effort at imitating that great love, and so walking worthy of the Gospel, how their lives would be transformed! It is far easier to fetter your life with yards of red-tape prescriptions — do this, do not do that — far easier to out-pharisee the Pharisees in punctilious scrupulosities, than it is honestly, and for one hour, to take the Cross of Christ as the pattern of your lives, and to shape yourselves by that.

One looks round upon a lethargic, a luxurious, a self-indulgent, a self-seeking, a world-besotted professing Church, and asks: ‘Are these the people on whose hearts a cross is stamped?’ Do these men — or rather let us say, do we live as becometh the Gospel which proclaims the divinity of self-sacrifice, and that the law of a perfect human life is perfect self-forgetfulness, even as the secret of the divine nature is perfect love? ‘Walk worthy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.’

III. Then again, there is another form of this same general prescription which suggests to us a kindred and yet somewhat different standard.

We are also bidden to bring our lives into conformity to, and correspondence with, or, as the Bible has it, ‘to walk worthy of, the calling wherewith we are called’ ([Ephesians 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Eph%204.1)).

God summons or invites us, and summons us to what? The words which follow our text answer, ‘Who calleth you into His own kingdom and glory.’ All you Christian people have been invited, and if you are Christians you have accepted the invitation; and all you men and women, whether you are Christians or not, have been and are being invited and summoned into a state and a world (for the reference is to the future life), in which God’s will is supreme, and all wills are moulded into conformity with that, and into a state and a world in which all shall — because they submit to His will — partake of His glory, the fulness of His uncreated light.

That being the aim of the summons, that being the destiny that is held out before us all, ought not that destiny and the prospect of what we may be in the future, to fling some beams of guiding brightness on to the present?

Men that are called to high functions prepare themselves therefor. If you knew that you were going away to Australia in six months, would you not be beginning to get your outfit ready? You Christian men profess to believe that you have been called to a condition in which you will absolutely obey God’s will, and be the loyal subjects of His kingdom, and in which you will partake of God’s glory. Well then, obey His will here, and let some scattered sparklers of that uncreated light that is one day going to flood your soul lie upon your face to-day. Do not go and cut your lives into two halves, one of them all contradictory to that which you expect in the other, but bring a harmony between the present, in all its weakness and sinfulness, and that great hope and certain destiny that blazes on the horizon of your hope, as the joyful state to which you have been invited. ‘Walk worthy of the calling to which you are called.’

And again, that same thought of the destiny should feed our hope, and make us live under its continual inspiration. A walk worthy of such a calling and such a caller should know no despondency, nor any weary, heartless lingering, as with tired feet on a hard road. Brave good cheer, undimmed energy, a noble contempt of obstacles, a confidence in our final attainment of that purity and glory which is not depressed by consciousness of present failure — these are plainly the characteristics which ought to mark the advance of the men in whose ears such a summons from such lips rings as their marching orders.

And a walk worthy of our calling will turn away from earthly things. If you believe that God has summoned you to His kingdom and glory, surely, surely, that should deaden in your heart the love and the care for the trifles that lie by the wayside. Surely, surely, if that great voice is inviting, and that merciful hand is beckoning you into the light, and showing you what you may possess there, it is not walking according to that summons if you go with your eyes fixed upon the trifles at your feet, and your whole heart absorbed in this present fleeting world. Unworldliness, in its best and purest fashion — by which I mean not only a contempt for material wealth and all that it brings, but the sitting loose by everything that is beneath the stars — unworldliness is the only walk that is ‘worthy of the calling wherewith ye are called.’

And ‘if you hear that voice ringing like a trumpet call, or a commander’s shout on the battlefield, into your ears, ever to stimulate you, to rebuke your lagging indifference; if you are ever conscious in your inmost hearts of the summons to His kingdom and glory, then, no doubt, by a walk worthy of it, you will make your calling sure; and there shall ‘an entrance be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom.’

IV. And the last of the phases of this prescription which I have to deal with is this.

The whole Christian duty is further crystallised into the one command, to walk in a manner conformed to, and corresponding with, the character which is impressed upon us.

In the last chapter of the Epistle to the Romans (verse 2), we read about a very small matter, that it is to be done ‘worthily of the saints.’ It is only about the receiving of a good woman who was travelling from Corinth to Rome, and extending hospitality to her in such a manner as became professing Christians; but the very minuteness of the details to which the great principle is applied points a lesson. The biggest principle is not too big to be brought down to the narrowest details, and that is the beauty of principles as distinguished from regulations. Regulations try to be minute, and, however minute you make them, some case always starts up that is not exactly provided for in them, and so the regulations come to nothing. A principle does not try to be minute, but it casts its net wide and it gathers various cases into its meshes. Like the fabled tent in the old legend that could contract so as to have room for but one man, or expand wide enough to hold an army, so this great principle of Christian conduct can be brought down to giving ‘Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church at Cenchrea,’ good food and a comfortable lodging, and any other little kindnesses, when she comes to Rome. And the same principle may be widened out to embrace and direct us in the largest tasks and most difficult circumstances.

‘Worthily of saints’ — the name is an omen, and carries in it rules of conduct. The root idea of ‘saint’ is ‘one separated to God,’ and the secondary idea which flows from that is ‘one who is pure.’

All Christians are ‘saints.’ They are consecrated and set apart for God’s service, and in the degree in which they are conscious of and live out that consecration, they are pure.

So their name, or rather the great fact which their name implies, should be ever before them, a stimulus and a law. We are bound to remember that we are consecrated, separated as God’s possession, and that therefore purity is indispensable. The continual consciousness of this relation and its resulting obligations would make us recoil from impurity as instinctively as the sensitive plant shuts up its little green fingers when anything touches it; or as the wearer of a white robe will draw it up high above the mud on a filthy pavement, Walk ‘worthily of saints’ is another way of saying, Be true to your own best selves. Work up to the highest ideal of your character. That is far more wholesome than to be always looking at our faults and failures, which depress and tempt us to think that the actual is the measure of the possible, and the past or present of the future. There is no fear of self-conceit or of a mistaken estimate of ourselves. The more clearly we keep our best and deepest self before our consciousness, the more shall we learn a rigid judgment of the miserable contradictions to it in our daily outward life, and even in our thoughts and desires. It is a wholesome exhortation, when it follows these others of which we have been speaking (and not else), which bids Christians remember that they are saints and live up to their name.

A Christian’s inward and deepest self is better than his outward life. We have all convictions in our inmost hearts which we do not work out, and beliefs that do not influence us as we know they ought to do, and sometimes wish that they did. By our own fault our lives but imperfectly show their real inmost principle. Friction always wastes power before motion is produced.

So then, we may well gather together all our duties in this final form of the all-comprehensive law, and say to ourselves, ‘Walk worthily of saints.’ Be true to your name, to your best selves, to your deepest selves. Be true to your separation for God’s service, and to the purity which comes from it. Be true to the life which God has implanted in you. That life may be very feeble and covered by a great deal of rubbish, but it is divine. Let it work, let it out. Do not disgrace your name.

These are the phases of the law of Christian conduct. They reach far, they fit close, they penetrate deeper than the needle points of minute regulations. If you will live in a manner corresponding to the character, and worthy of the love of God, as revealed in Christ, and in conformity with the principles that are enthroned upon His Cross, and in obedience to the destiny held forth in your high calling, and in faithfulness to the name that He Himself has impressed upon you, then your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the painful and punctilious pharisaical obedience to outward commands, and all things lovely and of good report will spring to life in your hearts and bear fruit in your lives.

One last word — all these exhortations go on the understanding that you are a Christian, that you have taken Christ for your Saviour, and are resting upon Him, and recognising in Him the revelation of God, and in His Cross the foundation of your hope; that you have listened to, and yielded to, the divine summons, and that you have a right to be called a saint. Is that presumption true about you, my friend? If it is not, Christianity thinks that it is of no use wasting time talking to you about conduct.

It has another word to speak to you first, and after you have heard and accepted it, there will be time enough to talk to you about rules for living. The first message which Christ sends to you by my lips is, Trust your sinful selves to Him as your only all-sufficient Saviour. When you have accepted Him, and are leaning on Him with all your weight of sin and suffering, and loving Him with your ransomed heart, then, and not till then, will you be in a position to hear His law for your life, and to obey it. Then, and not till then, will you appreciate the divine simplicity and breadth of the great command to walk worthy of God, and the divine tenderness and power of the motive which enforces it, and prints it on yielding and obedient hearts, even the dying love and Cross of His Son. Then, and not till then, will you know how the voice from heaven that calls you to His kingdom stirs the heart like the sound of a trumpet, and how the name which you bear is a perpetual spur to heroic service and priestly purity. Till then, the word which we would plead with you to listen to and accept is that great answer of our Lord’s to those who came to for a rule of conduct, instead of for the gift of life: ‘This is the work of God, that ye should believe on Him whom He hath sent.’