

Spiritual Slothfulness

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In these last days there is a very real danger threatening the children of God, most insidious, and therefore more dangerous. This is spiritual slothfulness. In former times when, to confess Christ entailed the loss of all one's possessions, and possibly of life itself, this danger hardly existed. The risk was so real and great that a man had to be in deadly earnest before taking it.

But in Christendom generally all that is now past, each man thinks and believes as he likes, and no one takes any notice. And yet, while persecution has virtually ceased, how is it that one meets so few Christians who, like the apostle Paul, are ready to give up everything in order to "win Christ?" So many have commenced their Christian course full of zeal, and most anxious to work for Christ, but little by little the first love has declined, and gradually the spirit of slumber has overcome them, and they are at last content to live, with outwardly blameless lives no doubt, but with no real "heart for Christ." He is no longer the one object of their affections, and it is sometimes difficult to perceive any difference between them (true believers though they may be) and men of the world. May not the cause of this sad decline be found in "spiritual slothfulness?" The Spirit of God has not failed to take account of this grave danger, for in the book of Proverbs alone may be found some 24 verses speaking of slothfulness and its effects, and how often is not the believer, directly or indirectly, urged to be diligent?

But let us now see if we cannot find what, in the Christian life, is the first cause, or germ, of this terrible spiritual disease, which saps the very life of the believer, and utterly destroys all true testimony for Christ.

I believe that the beginning of all decline is *neglect of prayer*. In nearly all the epistles we find the Spirit stressing the great importance of prayer in such words as these; "Continuing instant in prayer;" "Praying always with all prayer;" "Continue in prayer and watch;" "Pray without ceasing."

We read that our blessed Lord, during the three and a half years of His public ministry, was constantly in prayer, and on one occasion we are told that He continued all night in prayer to God. And on the night of His betrayal, in the mount of Olives, He prayed over and over again, until at last, being in an agony, He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. If that blessed Man, the sinless One, our great Example, so realised the need of prayer, how great must *our* need be!

The next step on the downward path will be *neglect of the Scriptures*. When, after the death of Moses, the Lord instructed Joshua as to his course on leading the people into the land, He said, "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night." Further, it was ordered that in the days to come, when the people should desire to set up a king like unto the nations around them, he should only be a man of God's choice, and that when he sat upon the throne of the kingdom he should write him a copy of the law; that it was to be with him, that he might read therein all the days of his life, and so learn to fear the Lord his God.

Throughout the law and the prophets there is continual mention of the Word of the Lord, while in the Psalms we are constantly reminded of the blessedness resulting from the study and meditation of God's statutes and testimonies. When our blessed Lord was tempted by the devil He met and vanquished him by the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, alone. When

opposed by the scribes and Pharisees, His invariable reply was, "What saith the Scripture?"

The apostle Paul writes thus to Timothy: "From a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise." Peter, in his first epistle, says, "As newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby." And later on, writing to those "that have obtained like precious faith with us," he earnestly warns them of the danger of becoming lax in Christian walk, lest they should become barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, and seeks to stir them up by putting them in remembrance of these things.

From these few examples we see the paramount importance of reading and meditating on the holy Scriptures, the Word of God; for the neglect of this will gradually lead the slothful soul to the third step of decline, namely, conformity to the world, and the loss of that separation which is so strongly insisted on in Scripture. It were easy to quote many Scriptures to prove this, but hardly necessary.

I would only add a sentence or two from John 17; "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world;" "Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me."

Beloved Brethren, we are now in the very last days, and the words of our blessed Lord ring ever more clearly in our ears; "Surely I come quickly;" let us then pay more earnest heed to what His beloved disciple John says; "And now, little children, abide in Him: that when He shall appear we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming."

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