

Chapter VIII

CHRISTLIKENESS

IV—Gentleness and Creative Power

The fourth aspect of development in Christlikeness is *the quality of gentleness*. We cannot read the Gospels without noticing that Jesus was tremendously gentle. By gentleness, I am not for a minute suggesting the sentimentality so often expressed by a hymn like "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild." The New Testament picture of Jesus is nothing like that. He was gentle but he was never pharisaical or censorious. He had time for the weak and the poor. It was said of him: "A bruised reed shall he not break; a smoking flax shall he not quench." He displayed great tenderness to people nobody else wanted, the unloved and the unlovely. He went out of his way to give his friendship and he gave it with gentleness. There is strength in his gentleness, too, because he would speak out for the truth if that was the way really to be kind.

The early church caught the spirit of its Master, and in the first century the Christian community was very different from the world around it. Professor Herbert Butterfield remarks:

Christianity must have an influence in every age. Christian teaching contains certain elements which will produce a

softening of manners; in the ancient Roman empire it stressed the sanctity of human life, the importance of the family, the evils of sexual licence and divorce, the wickedness of suicide or the gladiatorial contests or the murder of infants. Christianity was standing for a higher estimation of personality, based on the view of man as a spiritual creature. Furthermore the organization of charity was carried by the Christian church to the point at which we can regard it as an original contribution to the life of the time. In the fundamental place which it gave to love, in its emphasis on gentleness, humility, joy, and peace, the Christian was parting from the ethical ideas of the pagan world, and promoting a different kind of personality, a different posture for human beings under the sun.¹

This gentleness of manner springs from a deep sense of the wonder of God's forgiveness. What should matter most to the real Christian is the fact that Christ receives one just as one is. With all one's sins and weaknesses one is loved and forgiven. If this is so then how can one be ungenerous to other sinners? In light of God's forgiveness to me I must ask myself: "Who am I not to forgive others?" We pray in the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us." We who have been really forgiven by God, accepted by him as we are, must also accept other people as they are. I think it is true to say that one cannot genuinely experience God's forgiveness for oneself, and not in turn be a forgiving person. There is something radically wrong if one is not. Jesus made this point in his parable about the man pardoned of a hundred thousand pound debt who then demands from his neighbor a five pound note. The hard, ungenerous, mean attitude was utterly condemned. The hallmark of Christlikeness is to be a forgiving person. This generosity of spirit, this gentleness of attitude is the supremely important Christian characteristic.

Sometimes I am worried about the worldwide church. What worries me is that often it does not appear to be the place where,

above all else, true forgiveness abounds. I can understand, and in a way I am not unduly perturbed—though do not misunderstand me—if the Christian church contains among its members adulterers, and jealous people, and selfish people, and all other kinds of sinners. But it does matter terribly if the Christian church has unforgiving people in its midst, people who call themselves Christians, but who are not gentle and generous towards others. Such people deny the very experience that has made them Christians.

I remember with happiness a Christian lady who gave a warm welcome and her extended friendship to a man and woman who began to worship in my church. This couple had lived together unmarried for seventeen years. They had two children and were trying to make a real home for them. For many years they had stayed away from the church, but by chance we made contact with them and they began to come again. They could not get married for his wife was still alive, and there was no divorce. I am not justifying that wrong relationship; it was, from a Christian standpoint, sinful. But I experienced real happiness by the way in which the members of my congregation welcomed them, made them feel at home in church and gave them the gentleness of friendship.

Closely linked with the unforgiving spirit is the censorious attitude which negates Christian gentleness. Smugness, self-righteousness, complacency, a better-than-thou attitude prevent us from showing the generosity toward others which we ought to show. This is a danger which besets many Christian enthusiasts. They are often found in the more evangelical congregations. They are full of evangelistic zeal, and serve the Lord most fervently. They are very keen, and they are very consecrated to Christ. So often, however, they tend to pass judgment on their fellow Christians. They refer to them as the "weaker brethren" who must not be scandalized. They are quite sure in their own minds that *they* themselves could never be a cause of stumbling to anyone. They question the sincerity of the conversion of others, and speak

doubtfully of the genuineness of their Christianity. Here lurks a real spiritual danger. The enthusiasts may sometimes be quite right, and those whom they think are not converted may really not be converted. Often they are showing, however, a censorious spirit, and are lacking in gentleness as well as in spiritual discernment.

Many disciples of our Lord who are indeed the salt of the earth are quite unassuming saints with a deep love for their Lord, giving themselves constantly in simple, unpublicized selfless service. Many of the best Christians I know would not fit happily into the role of these fervent evangelists. Yet they possess an attractive gentleness which quietly draws many of their friends towards God.

The fifth aspect of development in Christlikeness is the *desire to share the good news*. It cannot escape notice as we read the Gospels that wherever Jesus went he talked about God. He was always on his Father's business, telling people about the Father, and trying to bring people to the Father. To put it simply, he always sought to share his Father with everyone else.

When a Christian starts growing in Christlikeness he will *desire* to share Christ with others. The word "desire" is important. It is not that we must agonize until we think we really can say a word for God. This very sentence and the phrase "word for God" suggest something rather gruesome and unnatural; but it is quite beside the point. It is much rather along the lines of the Quaker saying: "Never speak unless thou dar'st not keep silence." We ought to be Christians of such quality that on occasion we dare not keep silent. We should be so constrained by the love of Christ that we should be impelled to share Christ as such opportunity offers. After all, the knowledge of Christ should be the best experience I have, the best secret I have. If I am a friend with anyone, I ought to want to share with my friend my best. This is quite natural and unembarrassing. There should be neither strain here, nor nervous stress. People I know only casually are not people with whom, as a rule, I share my intimate secrets. To

such people, while taking every opportunity that naturally presents itself to bear witness to my faith, I shall not perhaps introduce the subject of personal religion. When, however, I know someone well enough to talk about any subject that crops up, then I am beginning to be on a basis of friendship where I can share Christ.

Before the Second World War when I was a vicar in North London I chaired an interesting monthly open-air meeting. The three speakers were a Roman Catholic controversialist, a Congregational minister, and myself. We tried to answer any questions that were thrown at us. On one occasion I remember some Communist hecklers becoming very angry with us and accusing us of having a specious unity. They shouted: "This unity of you Christians is phoney. Isn't it true that the Roman Catholic speaker wants to make you Roman Catholic, too, so where's the unity?" My answer came straight from the shoulder: "Of course he wants me to be a Roman Catholic, because we happen to be very good friends; and therefore naturally as a friend he wants me to share the best he has." The Roman Catholic himself added: "That's right. Of course I do; but I also want to add that we have a real unity in that I recognize that he, no less than I, belongs to the mystical and spiritual Body of Christ." The point is clear. Real friendship is sharing, and into this sharing comes the sharing of the best I know, the knowledge of Christ.

One of the most disastrous failures in this connection, and one of the most common, is seen in the realm of marriage. I cannot understand how a real Christian can marry someone who is not. More amazing still is the infrequency with which ministers teach and warn against this mistake." A Christian home is impossible unless both partners are Christians. The sharing of the body can be fully satisfying and the sharing of the mind can provide companionship. But unless there is also a sharing of the spirit there is something of deep significance missing. On this the New Testament is quite clear. In theory all Christians would agree on this, but in practice they may act differently.

The time to start is when a boy and girl, a man and woman,

have begun to become friends. As love begins to develop between them, then is the time for the Christian to share his knowledge of God. The man may say: "I don't want to rush her or disturb her; I don't want to push her into believing in Christ because I do." Such an attitude is foolish and wrong. If the man loves the girl at all sincerely he should want to try to give her the best he has to offer, and that is his faith. Moreover, the argument that he does not want his girl friend to be influenced toward something which is necessary and worthwhile. Human love can often be the gateway to the discovery of divine love.

I must write plainly. I find it difficult to understand and to respect young people who say they love Christ, and yet never seem to do anything about trying to bring their friends to him. I know we should not argue from our own experience, yet sometimes we cannot help doing so. When, after a childhood training in the Christian faith, I came gradually into a real conversion experience, I remember that within a couple of months after I knew I was Christ's, most of my real friends knew about it. Some did not like it, and I lost a few friends. But to me at the time, it was tremendously important that my friends should share what I had experienced and to know what I knew. Looking back, I am sure that I was not always wise or tactful but I was being very natural.

I think I would prefer to have a Christian at the age of nineteen a little too fanatical and over-enthusiastic. As he grows older he will cool down and mature, and in middle life he will probably still be a decided Christian. But if at nineteen he is still lukewarm and unenthusiastic in his Christian faith, by the time he is middle-aged he will probably have lapsed into indifference and have backslidden.

This is a real challenge which middle-aged Christians ought to face if they are seeking to be Christlike. Some of them have not spoken about Jesus Christ to anybody for years. Some have never even spoken to their children about the need to love and serve Jesus. They probably will have made a few remarks about the

value of religion, or put forward a suggestion that it is a good thing to go to church, but there has been no plain, forthright talking about God and the need for faith in him. This is a sin, a plain, downright sin, for it is a betrayal of Christ. Christians of all ages, if they really love their Lord and want to share him, should be on the lookout for opportunities to do so.

I agree that we have to be wise. We have no right to embarrass others foolishly; there must be a proper propriety. We have no right to intrude ruthlessly into the private lives of others. All this is granted. It is also granted that we are shy and self-conscious about things that matter most to us. Perhaps the deeper our love and knowledge of Christ the more sacred and intimate it becomes, so that we find it difficult to share him. We are afraid, to use the Bible phrase, to cast our pearls before swine lest they be trampled and defiled. All this is understandable. But the way to deal with this is not by arguments with one's self or by forcing oneself to do one's duty. Self-consciousness disappears when we look away from ourselves, and center our thinking upon the need for our friend, our love for him, our desire for his well-being. Then we can think of Christ, and all that he can be to that friend. As we do this we shall find that we are forgetting ourselves. In the richness of the consciousness of what Christ is and what he can be to others, we shall find ourselves sharing naturally and spontaneously in a way which wins and does not repel, which offers Christ, but does not thrust him upon the soul of another.

The sixth and final aspect of Christlikeness is *a growth in creative power*. Jesus was not dull. He was always creative. I wonder why his friends asked him to a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and why he accepted the invitation. I am sure he did not just go in order to do a miracle and to turn water into wine. I believe he was asked because his friends wanted him there. He was a pleasant and happy guest. There are many hints in the Gospels that Jesus was often asked out to dinner; and this is noteworthy. He was often asked to have a meal with sinners and those on the fringe or quite outside the church. Why did they ask him? Because,

to use our modern colloquialism, he helped to make the party go. When he was present people knew that he was there. His personality was sparkling and attractive. It is this aspect of Jesus that I want to consider for a moment.

He had real creative power. He took hold of situations; he related to people and transforming them. This is what his Spirit can do for us. We are not given within his teachings a hard and fast blue-print for a Christian society—the kingdom of God. Jesus gives us no pigeon-holed directions for living. There is no ethical code, all numbered, so that we can look up the appropriate number when we are at a loss to know how to act. There are no stereotyped answers. Christ instead gives us a spirit with which to face life, not a method with which to solve problems. That is what I mean by creative power.

Christians possessed by the Spirit of Christ need not be pushed about or broken by the stresses of life. We can react with Christlikeness to all that presses upon us. There is the difference. We may not have a blue-print, but we have the Spirit of Christ within us to enable us to react Christianly and creatively to all that life brings.

This has always been true in Christian history. Initiative, as well as enthusiasm, have been marks of Christlikeness. New ideas have sprung into the minds of persons led by the Spirit of God; these ideas have then been translated into action. That is what ought to have been happening continually. One of the great tragedies of organized religion is that so often it takes men and women, channels their spiritual life, and conventionalizes their souls. This is perhaps the damning fact about institutional religion. We have turned out conventional Anglicans, conventional high churchmen. One of the most important tasks for Christian leadership today, as always, is to allow new disciples of Christ to develop their individuality under the creative guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps the most tragic illustration of this in my personal experience happened over forty years ago. An Oxford woman graduate, after some years of agnosticism and a very great intel-

lectual struggle, came into a real Christian experience. It was deeply mystical and it was changing her in a quite remarkable way. She joined other Oxford students on one of my missions. Once or twice she gave her witness to Christ in public. To hear her was to be greatly moved. There were no Bible quotations or clichés; she spoke simply and naturally out of her fresh mystical experience. Artistic by temperament, she painted a moving picture of what God had done and was doing for her. It fascinated the hearers by its originality and by its outreach.

After one such occasion a fine and most sincere Christian leader came up to me, and pointed out that in her opinion the speaker needed instruction in the Bible. "Her theology is all wrong. Unless she gets her ideas straight she will cease to go forward and will slip back in the Christian life. She ought to go to a Bible school." I was inexperienced; I rather weakly agreed, although not very happily.

My friend went to a Bible college. It was good and it was sound. Yet in three months she had lost her hard-won faith and had slipped back into an experience of doubt and difficulty. Eight more years had to elapse before once again she had recovered her faith. She never got back quite the freshness of the mystical experience she once enjoyed. The reason was the attempt, well-meaning, sincere, and honest, but wholly misguided, to conventionalize, to standardize, to make sound, yes, even to make biblical, a rich, fresh, individual, inner experience of the Holy Spirit.

I realize that there is a danger here in what I am trying to say. But the work of the Holy Spirit is never safe; in a very real sense it is dangerous. The first Christians were thought to be drunk, and they spoke with tongues seeming to babble. It was mysterious and disconcerting; it did not always seem to make sense. But it was a mighty and real experience of the creative power of the Spirit.

Today when Christians talk they often talk in a petty, trifling way. They do not challenge evil. They discuss and argue secondary matters. They often seem to have no plan or purpose. They certainly do not thunder out in challenging, startling, and dangerous

tones the Word of God against the evil of the world. The organized church is afraid to run risks. If we prefer conformity and security to enthusiasm and the running of risks, then we can make our choice; but we shall certainly stifle the work of the Holy Spirit. Today visions can be awkward and misleading, but where there is no vision the people perish. Where there is no creative power of the Spirit the Church languishes and falls down on its objective.

Review: Chapter 1: A Beginning is Necessary

Chapters 2 thru 9 : The Marks of a true Christian Life -

- 1) Certainty,
- 2) A Life of "Tension",
- 3) A Life of Daily Communion,
- 4) A Life of Growth in Christlikeness

(including the rising aspects of Efficiency, Understanding, Willingness to Suffer, Gentleness and Creative Power),
And now the 5th Mark, A Life of Fellowship.

Chapter IX

A LIFE OF FELLOWSHIP

The fifth mark of the Christian life is that it is *a life of fellowship*. In a very real sense there is no such person as a solitary believer. The old Roman Catholic doctrine that "there is no salvation outside the church" is true although not in the way it is normally applied. To the Roman Catholic the "Church" means his church and none other; therefore, the doctrine affirms that outside the Roman Catholic communion no one can be truly saved in the sense of finding the fullness of Christian experience here on earth. In the next life the non-Roman Catholic can find salvation only through the uncovenanted grace of God, provided he has died in good faith.

If, on the other hand, we use the word "church" in what to us is the true biblical sense, the universal Body of Christ, then the dogma is a true statement of fact. Outside and apart from the church one cannot find the Christian experience. If one turns to the Bible one is using the book of the church; for apart from preserving and translating the church writings there would be no Scriptures. Consider also the sacraments which originated within and are passed through the life of the church. If one hears the preaching of the gospel, that proclamation is made by a member

of the church. Only through contact with, and through eventually coming within, the Body of Christ can an individual find the true salvation which Christ offers.

To put it somewhat differently, I cannot be a Christian by myself, for at the heart of the Christian faith and practice stands the Holy Communion. This is the fellowship meal. I cannot have the Holy Communion by myself. It is a shared feast with other believers.

It is clear, then, that the Christian church is not simply an extra which I can enjoy if I so choose. It is not an optional subject for examination in Christian proficiency. It is not a club which I can join if I feel inclined to pay the membership subscription. No, it is a body to which I cannot help but belong if I am a Christian at all. The biblical phrase, "a man in Christ," does not mean simply someone who personally believes in and shares in the divine life of Christ; it carries with it also the thought that one shares in the life of Christ in and through Christ's Body, the church.

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit was given indeed to individuals. The Spirit came "when they were all with one accord in one place" and "sat upon each of them." The church is the incarnate Body of Christ here on earth through which Christ still lives and works, through which worship is offered to God, and through which he shares his redeeming message to the world and reveals his divine life to those outside.

If, therefore, it is true that outside the church there is no salvation, then the Christian church is not simply a social fellowship where we meet like-minded friends, nor is it a club of earnest-minded people who wish to serve the community for Christ's sake, although indeed incidentally the church is both. It is first and foremost a fellowship or family of those who are saved by the precious blood of Christ, who meet as a community of the redeemed, as a society of the forgiven, with a deep gratitude to their Savior, and a genuine love for each other. From this gratitude, and through

this love, they are inspired and strengthened to serve their Lord in the world in which they live.

The expression of such a fellowship is a wide subject, and I can only draw attention to two or three salient points. If we keep this idea of fellowship in our minds, then the habit of churchgoing is seen in an entirely different light. What is the motive? It is not that we go to church on Sunday because we think it will help us, or because we have been asked to pass around the offering plate. These are all genuine motives; but the real reason for regular church attendance is plainly and simply because we are members of a family, and our place must not be empty at the family gathering.

Here is a conception of the solidarity of believers which would transform our Sunday worship. We should see the whole act as a family act. We should see the need to play our particular part within it. We should not test the value of this worship by whether we feel uplifted and inspired, or whether the sermon is helpful or not. We often should be inspired, and I hope the sermon would often be helpful. But the real joy and value to us would be that after worship we could look back and say, "I was there, there in my place, part of the whole worshiping body of Christ's faithful people." This conception of fellowship would also save us from that parochialism which bedevils so miserably the Christian church. So often one hears of little congregations of Christians refusing even to move their building from some downtown factory area into a developing suburb where thousands of people have no church building, and where there is no worshiping Christian community. We see congregations raising thousands of dollars to beautify their own sanctuary, yet ignoring completely the needs in Africa or Asia for the very essentials that are necessary for the building and developing of the Christian church. I am sure the Roman Catholic Church too is bedevilled with parochialisms, with diocesan introversion, and with other points of narrow-mindedness. But at last her people have a conception of "mother church," the one same church throughout the world.

The sinful divisions between the reformed churches make it more difficult for our members to grasp the idea of the one church. Yet if we could but grasp and put into practice the implications of this idea of the Christian life as a life of fellowship, then the worldwide church of Christ would take on a new meaning, and we should see our part within it. Naturally, we should be concerned to heal the outward and visible divisions which keep us apart and make intercommunion difficult; but we should be able to see even now a unity which is greater than our separateness. In Slocum-on-the-Mud, a little village in Suffolk, we as Christians would begin to understand that our mission for Christ is to the whole world; we are his church, and his church is worldwide. The implications of this new sense of fellowship for Christian strategy are obvious.

Another implication of fellowship is that it would reemphasize the true meaning of the laity, the people of God. In some branches of Christ's church the division between clergy and laity is too marked. In others, although theoretically the minister is only a person with a special function to lead worship, to preach the Word, and to administer the sacraments, too much of the leadership and strategy of the church in practice is left in his hands. In part, this is understandable. It springs not from any slackness or theory, but from the general pressure of life. The minister is the full-time professional; the lay people are, as it were, part-time volunteers. Therefore on his shoulders must fall the larger burden of the church's work.

This may be a part of the explanation, but the situation is nonetheless unhealthy. I doubt very much whether the church in the twentieth century will ever regain her true vigor and drive until both ministers and lay people realize afresh that they are linked together in an indissoluble fellowship. They must realize that they are equally members of the family, so that on each and all of them lies the responsibility for the life and witness of the church. Together they must shoulder this responsibility, or else there can be no more advance.

This means a good deal more than merely suggesting that lay men and women take on further responsibility within the church organization, the church building, and the church activities. It means that Christian lay men and women must see themselves as the church, active and witnessing in their neighborhood and in every part of their daily lives. They are the church, and they are responsible for its witness.

This fellowship demands that each of us who is a Christian should also give thought and care to discovering the proportion of our resources that should be dedicated in a special way to God and his church. For some, the Old Testament principle of tithing may seem right; for others some other method may be preferable; but for all of us there should be some conscious and deliberate settlement of what we give week by week to the service of Christ and of his church. Casual and impulsive giving may sometimes seem more generous and more spontaneous. But pledged, regular, and thought-out giving is an evidence of a truer sense of fellowship and shared responsibility. These are some of the implications of the Christian life when it is seen to be a life of fellowship—a life in Christ, shared and lived within the unity and as a member of the family of those who belong to the same Lord and who own the same Savior. The purpose of this unity in fellowship is not primarily for our own spiritual strengthening and happiness; it is outward-looking, and is meant to be a witness that the world may know through our oneness, our one Lord and Savior and the one true God.

Chapter X

A LIFE OF DISCOVERY

The sixth mark of the real Christian life is that it is *a life of discovery*. This note is very evident in the New Testament. In the opening words of his letter to the Christians at Ephesus, Paul tells his friends that he is praying to God that they might receive “a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe.”¹ He echoes the words of the Lord Jesus who promised that “when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth.”²

As we grow in the Christian life we should come to discover something of what it really means to be a Christian, and what are the spiritual resources at our disposal. It will be given to us to know more about God, and more about persons. There is no standing still; there is the glorious adventure of possessing unsearchable spiritual riches, some of which we can always be discovering and appropriating. This is what gives to the Christian experience its freshness. There is nothing static; it is meant to be

a moving forward into fresh insights, fresh knowledge and fresh action.

There is no doubt that this is the climate of the New Testament, but I am not at all sure that it is the climate in which the modern Christian lives. In very many Christian communities the adventure of spiritual discovery seems to be absent. There seems to be no life and movement. Spiritual fervor seems to be at a low ebb, and individual Christians seem to be stationary with regard to any progress.

It is, therefore, important to emphasize early this note of discovery in the Christian life. In my evangelistic work I naturally meet many who have been privileged to have a dramatic conversion, a definite crisis in the process of their Christian experience. If I have the opportunity to see such people a little while after their conversion I have a question which I always try to ask. I do not say to them, "Do you feel happy? Are you behaving better? Is it lasting?" I ask rather, "What have you discovered?" Far more important than any feelings of happiness or even changed behavior is the discovery of something new and fresh about God. If a person has become alive to God through Christ then that individual ought to expect to discover and to find out more about the spiritual world as the days pass. The Christian life is meant to be a life of continuing discovery.

Some years ago I was asked to meet a brilliant young medical student, a girl of some eighteen years. Her parents never went near a church, and although in her very early teens she herself had gone for two or three years she had given it up from intellectual disbelief of what she heard taught there. She called herself an atheist. During her early months at the university, being a strong personality, she approached some of her Christian friends and badly confused them. They did not know how to handle her challenge. One day a fellow student, a Methodist, said to her: "I can't argue with you, you are too clever for me, but I'd bet you would not argue with a preacher." Her reply was immediate: "Of course I would, and I would love it."

That was how I came on the scene. For three hours we argued. I certainly failed to convince her, although I was able, being older and more experienced, to expose some of the weaknesses of her position. The only result was that we became friends. She had a good mind which I respected, so we met and continued our discussion. In the end, we got nowhere, and I concluded our final conversation with words something like these: "Only when God and life break you, will you really turn to him," and so we said goodbye.

I saw nothing more of her for some seven years, and then late one evening my telephone rang, and the caller asked if I remembered her name. I did not, and said so. Then she reminded me of our argument years before, and she went on to ask whether she could come and see me. The voice was urgent. Fortunately I was free and so I invited her to come immediately.

When she arrived, she walked into my room. Her first sentence was: "Do you remember the last words you said to me?" At the time I did not. "Well," she continued, "you told me that God would break me, and he has. Now I need help, and I don't know whether it is a psychiatrist or a pastor that I need. I want one or the other; I have decided to try you first."

As we began to talk I found out that she was a qualified doctor. She had married; much had happened in her life during the intervening years since we last met. Now life had broken her. She felt lonely, frustrated, spiritually naked and defenseless. She wanted God. That night God found her, very simply, very really.

During the next two or three months I saw her quite frequently. Each time I opened our talk with the word, "What have you discovered now?" Every time there was something new she was longing to tell me. On the first occasion this is what she said: "Do you remember what a tiny little bit of faith I had the other night, how very feeble my trust was when I genuinely turned to God? You told me that if I went on from that to try to obey what God told me to do, my faith would grow. I have discovered that is true. It is just what has happened." She had never read her Bible before,

but now she read it, and the whole picture came alive to her. A night after her conversion she read through Luke's Gospel. She produced on a paper a number of questions for me to answer. I found them to be the difficult questions and the difficult passages that were often included in an examination of the Scripture. And so it went on. As she followed Christ in the simple obedience of faith, she discovered rapidly and amazingly some of the truths about the Christian life and faith.

This is God's intention for all of us who are Christians. We are meant increasingly to know more about God and his character, about Christ and his teaching, and about the Holy Spirit and the way he leads us.

This idea of discovery applies to other aspects of Christian practice. I remember a man of forty-five asking me about prayer, for, as he told me, he found his prayers difficult and of little help. I agreed with him that prayer would always be difficult, but he pointed out that it was not just his prayers that were difficult, but that they were utterly unreal and of no help. "Excuse my asking," I said, "but what do you pray each night?" After a moment of hesitation he blurted out: "Well, as a matter of fact, I only pray what I was taught to pray when I was a child—'Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, look upon a little child.'" "How can that mean anything," I asked him, "to a man of forty-five?" He had never discovered in all these years anything more in prayer. His prayer life had been standing still.

The Bible contains many promises that God will guide his people, showing them the way they should go. For many of us the discovery of God's guiding hand is one of the great joys of our Christian lives. Some lay a good deal of insistence upon the seeking of guidance from God, trying to find out before we make a decision what is the decision he wants us to make. That there is a real truth here I am sure, and certainly in my own experience there have been crises in my life when I needed God's guidance, when I genuinely sought it, and when I believe I received it.

On the other hand, there is something even finer and more real

than this experience of the guiding hand of the heavenly Father. It was well expressed by a warden of Keble College, Oxford, in a letter which I had the opportunity of reading. He was writing about guidance. He said that in all his years of Christian experience he had had very few, if any, occasions when he definitely knew of God's guidance *before* he made a decision. To him it was a case of trying to look at a situation with the mind of Christ, searching the Scriptures for any help that he could find, asking the advice of Christian friends, and in his prayers telling God that he was willing to do what he wanted. Then he had to make his decision and act. He continued: "For many years I have kept a diary, and never a year has ended when, reading back over the previous twelve months, I have not been humbled and glad to see what I believe is the guiding hand of God upon my life." Here was the discovery of guidance which brought with it confidence and trust concerning whatever lay ahead.

The Christian must also learn to discover the breadth of God's love. Many Christians have looked at the people of other religions as if there is nothing real for them in the way of a knowledge of God, or even of true spiritual experience. All that they believe is evil; their worship is false and idolatrous. Other Christians, however, have discovered, as they come to understand God better, that the God they know in Christ is a self-disclosing God. At the very heart of his being lies a forgiving love which forever makes him want to reveal himself to all persons. The discovery of this great fact about God's nature opens our eyes. We begin to realize that if God is like this—a self-disclosing God—then he is, and always has been, seeking to disclose himself to persons everywhere.⁹ We should, therefore, expect to find among people of other religions here and there those who have caught a glimpse of God's self-disclosure, who have had some real spiritual insight, and who have had some genuine spiritual experience. True, it is not the full understanding and knowledge of God as revealed in Christ; but it is a real experience of God. This makes a very great

difference regarding our attitude to the great religions of the world, and to our relationships with those who practice them.

In another way the fuller discovery of God's nature in Christ makes me question the definitions of Christian dogma. Whereas I was able to express my faith previously in simple black-and-white propositions, now I see these human-made formulae to be only approximations of what I vaguely know, and of what the Christian church knows through experience about God. It is not that I throw over the great affirmations of the Christian creeds; I hold them still, and genuinely believe them. But I see them rather as human expressions of great, ineffable truths, as feeble approximations which cannot really express or contain what they are trying to say. True, this can produce an attitude of doubt which inhibits a clear and firm proclamation of the Christian faith, but it need not do so. It should, rather, lead to maturity of Christian thinking and expression, with a deep and genuine sympathy for the sincere agnostic, and for those on the fringe of the Christian church who would like to believe, but cannot.

To sum up, let me underline my main point here. This maturity or mellowness of Christian experience is not the result primarily of intellectual broadmindedness, nor is it the product of conscious effort. It springs, as I have suggested, naturally and spontaneously from a continual and fresh discovery of the nature of God and his ways with us. In the Psalms there is a lovely phrase which reads: "All my springs are in you."⁴ The Holy Spirit will work in our lives to give us fresh springs, fresh discoveries, fresh understandings and insights of God. Jesus meant much the same when he said: "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me . . . out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water."⁵

Chapter XI

A LIFE OF FREEDOM

The seventh mark of the Christian life is that it is *a life of freedom*. Whatever else the Christian life is, it is not primarily one to be lived under a series of rules and regulations. We are not under law; we are under grace. Paul was always very clear about this; the entire Epistle to the Galatians is largely a treatise upon this point. The Christians in Galatia had found the free forgiveness of God and were rejoicing in their new experience of forgiveness and acceptance in the Beloved. Then the legalizers arrived and tried to force them both to conform to certain ritual acts and ceremonies, and to accept the legal requirements of the Old Testament—all this above and beside the moral law which was fulfilled in Christ, and which the Galatian Christians gladly sought to obey. To them Paul gave his clarion call: "Stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."¹

He goes on to say that in one sense there are no binding rules or commandments which are obligatory for Christians. We must resist the ever present temptation that having become Christians through simple faith in Christ and all that he has done for us, we now seek to maintain our Christian life by the keeping of moral laws.

“Through the Spirit,” Paul continues, “we wait for the hope of righteousness.”²

This is the great law, the one law, for the Christian, the law of love, because “love is the fulfilling of the law.” In saying this, however, Paul is saying something tremendous because there is no such thing, correctly speaking, as free love. Love is the most binding force on earth. Here is a daughter going to Canada, let us say, for a year. She and her mother are devoted to each other. From one point of view it would be much easier for the girl, perhaps, if her mother gave her a list of twenty rules to keep if she was to be a dutiful daughter and please her mother. That would leave the girl quite free to do anything she liked within the ground covered by the twenty rules. But love is more binding than that. The mother gives her no rules. Yet in the girl’s mind and heart there is a consciousness of what would please her mother and what would not. The knowledge is inconvenient, for it covers the whole of life, both the known and the unknown situations, both the present and the future. Because she loves her mother she will always find the challenge and standard for her actions. She lives under love, and not under law.

So it is with the Christian life. Our main purpose put quite simply is to please God, or to put it in a more specifically Christian way, to please Christ. That is an enormously big task. There is no end to it, and there is no escape from it, if we really love him. From this point of view the Sermon on the Mount, for example, becomes not a series of moral laws which must be kept exactly and explicitly, but rather an expression of the ideal life for persons as Jesus sees it—the kind of human living that would please him and make him happy. If we love him we shall seek to live that kind of life, not because it is an obligation commanded, but because it is a life that would be pleasing to God.

The Ten Commandments are binding upon the Christian in a similar fashion, not just as the law of God laid down which, if we keep, we have done our duty, but as a moral law which expresses the nature and character of God whom we seek to serve. Because

these commandments help to make the world the kind of world that God wants, we must try to keep them out of love for him, and because loving him we seek to carry out his purpose in the world.

Is this just an academic argument, or does it really make a difference to think like this? I believe it does. In the first place our main question is "Will it please God? How can I express my love for Christ?" Sometimes it may seem impossible exactly to keep one of the commandments or exactly and fully to live up to some ideal of the Sermon on the Mount. We may find ourselves in a situation in which we are so involved that any action we take falls short of the ideal. We still can test ourselves by our love for Christ. What in these circumstances, with these commandments and these ideals in our mind, will please him best? We act then out of an expression of our love for him, although we are conscious of our failure to be perfect. He sees the offering of our love and accepts it.

From another point of view this thought is a help. Seeking to please God is so great a task that if we are sensitive to what it means we shall know that we can never properly be well-pleasing in his sight. As Jesus pointed out to his disciples, when all is done we are still unprofitable servants. This means that part of the experience of Christian living is to have an ever deepening sense of sin. We are always failing in love, and always will. Yet even as we know this we can rejoice in the fact that we are loved and forgiven by him whom we fail perfectly to please. We know we love him; although, like Peter, we hardly dare to say so.

This freedom from law and regulations is not a licence, for most certainly it is not a freedom to do just what we like. Paul realized the danger of this misunderstanding when he wrote: "You were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another."⁸ Our freedom from rules needs certain checks if we are to live within the law of love. It is, as I have written earlier in this book, a freedom within a fellowship.

What, for instance, do we mean as Protestant Christians when

we claim the right of private judgment? We certainly do not mean that every individual Christian can think just what he or she likes, and that one's view is as true as that of anyone else. This is the untrue charge that the Roman Catholic often brings against us. "Look," he argues, "at your Protestant Churches. Everyone can think what he likes. Look at the mess you are in about doctrine, all your differences of view and differences of practice. What you need is to return to a church which, with authority, will tell you what to think and how to act. You claim that you go to the Bible for your views. Well, it seems to me as if there are as many views as there are words in the Bible, judging by the results. You need an authoritative church which will tell you the true interpretation of the Bible. Then, and then only, will you get uniformity, and have a faith which everyone will accept, and a Christian life which everyone can practice."

This is the charge, and to it we must make a reply. First, we must admit that there is some truth in what the Roman Catholic said. Some Protestants think and teach just as they individually choose to think and teach. And that is not what we mean by the right of private judgment. As a member of a human family each of us possesses within the family circle the right of private judgment. As adult members we are ultimately free to think as we like, but not just casually or egotistically. If we are a real member of the family it is natural to pay careful regard to what the family thinks, to the atmosphere of the family life, to the practices and habits which make the family what it is. Then, and not until all this has been considered, is it our inalienable right to exercise our private judgment, to form our own views, and to make our own decisions.

Our private judgements can and must be exercised, but not without a real sharing of the life of the Christian family. This sharing will mean that we are forced to pay careful regard to what the church thinks, not merely to the present thinking of the church and to the Christian public opinion of the moment, but rather to the heritage of the past, to what the church has been thinking for two

thousand years. For example, in reading the Bible, I must not say of a passage, "I think it means this or that." Before I come to a conclusion I must ask, "What has the church thought about this passage since it was first written? What do the scholars think it means?" Then, and not till then, I exercise my private judgment. Sometimes I may be right in repudiating the whole experience of the tradition of two thousand years of Christianity; sometimes I may be right, and the whole Church wrong. But this is most unlikely. Yet it does seem to be part and parcel of the genuine Christian experience that this inalienable right of private judgment should be asserted as part of the freedom of the Christian.

It is not only about what we think, but about how we act, that we have this right of private judgment. The privilege of conscientious objection is a Christian privilege, and we must be prepared to take our stand even to the point of martyrdom. But once again, we must recognize the public opinion of the Christian church, and the accumulated wisdom of the past. It can only be in rare cases that the individual Christian is right and the concensus opinion of the whole church wrong. For instance, there is no law that forces each Christian every day to say his prayers, but Jesus prayed regularly, and for two thousand years Christians have done the same. My private judgment leaves me free either to pray daily or not to pray; but it is not likely that I am behaving properly if I repudiate this accumulated experience and decide that *I* can manage without private prayer.

History is full of examples of the way in which this matter of private judgment has worked. There have been many cases where the single prophet has had a clearer insight into God's will than the church of his day; and he has stood out alone and suffered for it. There will always be such occasions. The freedom to be Christian, as we see we ought to be Christian, is a privilege we should never give up.

To sum up, Christian freedom gives us the position where we stand before God himself answerable to him alone. Yet in humility we must give due consideration and weight both in our thinking

and behavior to what is the general public opinion of Christendom. In trying to estimate this we must bear in mind not only the teaching of the Bible, but the tradition of the past, of Christian history. We must open our minds to be influenced not only by academic argument and thought, but by the spirit of Christian worship, and the accumulated experience of Christian living. Then we are free, free to obey our consciences, to exercise our private judgments, and to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free.

Christian freedom is both dynamic and purposive. It is not only "freedom from" or "freedom in." It is primarily "freedom for" God's service. We are to be released from all bondage that our powers and the depths of our personality may be set free to be given gladly and used fully by him who has made us free.

Chapter XII

A LIFE OF HUMILITY

The eighth and final mark of the Christian life is that it is *a life of humility*. By humility I do not mean absence of conceit. Conceit in itself can be a minor sin, although it is unpleasant to others and disturbing to oneself. It is a stupid habit of mind and outlook rather than a major sin. I am reminded of the amusing story, probably apocryphal, of the Roman Catholic girl making her confession. She went regularly once a week. "Father," she confessed, "I am sorry to say I have to confess the same sin again this week. It is my worst sin, and I can't get over it. It is a terrible sin, and I am very ashamed of myself. I must tell you, Father, it is the sin of conceit. I am always thinking of myself as so very good-looking." "My child," replied her confessor, "that is not a sin; it's only a mistake." The girl left the confessional furiously angry so we are told.

No, humility is not an absence of conceit. Bishop Gore defined it like this: "Humility is seeing myself at my true value, others at their true value, and God at his true value." It is when I see myself as I am, and God as he is, that I become really humble. It is not connected, you will observe, with conceit at all. It is connected with pride, the deadliest of the seven deadly sins. Humility is

beautifully expressed by Paul when he wrote, "By the grace of God I am what I am." He puts no value upon the accident of his birth, his strict religious upbringing, his fervent enthusiasm, or all his other natural and cultural advantages. From one point of view they were valuable, but not to Paul as he thought of his Christian experience. What mattered there was that Christ loved him and gave himself for him, and that forgiveness, free and gracious, was offered to him.

I am humble when in the depths of my consciousness I know that if I am a Christian at all, it is because of God's love to me in Christ. It is his free and undeserved favor that has made me what I am. Then I can say with the utmost truth, "It is not I, but Christ that liveth in Me." Humility is the natural product of justification by grace.

When we realize that we are utterly unworthy of God's acceptance, God's forgiveness, God's friendship, and then come to know that all this can be ours utterly and only because Christ died for us, that everything we know of the experience of God is a free gift, that this free gift in no way depends upon our own efforts or our own merits; when we realize that the Christian life can never be self-made, but that it has to be God-given, then within us is born the humble spirit and the contrite heart. With true meaning our souls can sing:

In my hand no price I bring;
Simply to thy cross I cling.¹

This note of humility is the undertone of the real Christian's thinking and living. It is usually possible to detect it by the way a Christian talks and worships. As a rule, in talking about one's religion, one does not emphasize a "continued loyalty to Christ to whom one surrendered at confirmation"; one does not speak much about "commitment" or "personal dedication" to God's service. One talks rather, if one is sharing intimately, about one's continuing acceptance of God's forgiveness—"I always need that"; one stresses the constant need to receive the help of God's Spirit. Notice the difference—not "my dedication", my loyalty," "my

commitment," but "receiving what he gives," "accepting the forgiveness he offers."

I remember many years ago, at a well-known Christian convention, listening to an interesting demonstration of the point I am making. There must have been well over a thousand young people at that particular meeting. A young man and a young woman gave their testimonies. Both, I am sure, were real Christians, but only one had humility. The first, an Oxford graduate, spoke of his past life and his moral failures. He then told how he confessed his sins, shared them with a friend, and then told them to God. He shared how he made an absolute surrender, then how his life was changed, how he put this right and that right. It was all very true, genuine, and convincing. I do not doubt for a moment the truth of his conversion.

Then a young woman, a brilliant surgeon, spoke. Her life, too, had been one of irreligion and of moral failure. But her emphasis was that when she knew her need for God and for a different life she could do nothing about it. She tried but nothing happened. Then she heard the story of the gospel, the wonder of Christ's love, his death for her sins, the offer of God's forgiveness. Simply she told how she came to God and asked for his forgiveness, and how she received the gift of new life. Her story was utterly centered in Christ and what he had done, and what he was doing for her. Humility and gratitude were the keynotes.

Humility, then, springs from a conviction of utter dependence upon God, and that I am nothing except as he makes me something. It is no longer *my* faith that is of importance, but the object of faith that counts. This is true of the way in which one enters into the experience of justification. It is just as true of the way in which one continues to live the Christian life. "As therefore you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in him."² By faith I received Christ as my Savior and Lord, and my heart cried out to him, "Lord, forgive me; I don't deserve anything; take me as I am." Thus I took the Savior by faith; so I must walk and live the Christian life by the same faith. At its heart the Christian

life is a life of simple trust in God day by day, receiving as a little child all that God wants to be to me. That is why Jesus constantly stressed the need for a simple, childlike faith. Each day he means for me, as it were, to stand before him saying: "Lord here am I. Be to me today all that you want to be as a Savior, as a Friend, as a guide, as a Master." When this is a spontaneous and continuous attitude, my life will become Christ-centered, because I am looking utterly toward him all the time in trustful humility.

There is a delightful fable about the ocean. The sea, it is imagined, was one day feeling discontented. Disillusioned, it hated living at its low sea level when above it were drifting some delightful little white clouds scudding along before the wind. The sea grumbled to itself, "I don't see why I should be living down here at this low level. Why can't I live higher up, up there where the clouds are?" And so in its discontent and anger the sea began to lash itself in fierce high waves, flinging the foam of its spray high into the air; yet always it fell down again to the same low level of living. Then one day the sun smiled down on the sea and said kindly: "You want to live on a higher level? Then don't fret yourself, strain, and struggle. Lie still and look up." So the sea lay still, very still, and looked up. A warm wind arose, and the sun came down and carried some of the water up nearer to heaven, and presently there were seen some fresh white clouds moving overhead.

If we genuinely desire to live on a higher level of Christian life it is useless to strain and strive to reach heaven. Our business is to lie still and to look up to Christ. Then his Spirit will lift us up, enable us to live a fuller and better Christian life.

An old-fashioned chorus that I learned as a Child expresses the same idea:

Moment by moment, I'm kept in his love;
 Moment by moment I've life from above;
 Looking to Jesus till glory doth shine;
 Moment by moment, O Lord, I am thine.^a

In the New English Bible there is a delightful translation of the second verse of the twelfth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews: "Our eyes fixed on Jesus upon whom our faith depends from start to finish." I conclude with a prayer: 'O Lord, take our minds and think through them; take our lips and speak through them; take our lives and live out thy life; take our hearts and set them on fire with a love for thee; and guide us ever by thy Holy Spirit. Through Jesus Christ our Savior.'

Epilogue

(added to Forward Movement's reprint from 1977)

A review of what the Christian life is, or should be. Please note the further delineation of Canon Green's aspects of Christ-likeness. The Christian Life is:

1. A life of certainty;
2. A life of tension;
3. A life of daily communion;
4. A life of Christ-likeness, which means –
 - A rise in general personal efficiency,
 - A growth in the real understanding of human nature,
 - The willingness to suffer,
 - The development of the quality of gentleness,
 - The desire to share the good news,
 - A growth in creative power;
5. A life of fellowship;
6. A life of discovery;
7. A life of freedom; and, finally, it is
8. A life of humility.

Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings, with thy most gracious favor, and further us with thy continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in thee, we may glorify thy holy Name, and finally, by thy mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
[1979 BCP pg. 832]

NOTES

Chapter II

1. 1 John 3:14.
2. 2 Timothy 1:12.
3. 1 John 3:24.
4. John 17:3.
5. Philippians 3:8-10.
6. Revelation 3:20.
7. Romans 8:16.
8. John 16:14.
9. 1 Corinthians 12:3.

Chapter III

1. Romans 5:5.
2. Isaiah 53:11.
3. Masefield, John. "The Everlasting Mercy," in Masefield, John. *Poems*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1932, p. 88. Used by permission.

Chapter IV

1. Hebrews 10:19.
2. Hebrews 13:8.
3. Hebrews 13:5.
4. 2 Corinthians 12:9.
5. Acts 10:44, Rieu's translation.

Chapter V

1. 2 Peter 3:18.
2. 1 Peter 2:21.
3. 1 Corinthians 11:1.
4. 1 John 2:6.
5. 2 Corinthians 3:18.
6. Colossians 3:1,2.
7. Hebrews 12:2.
8. Philippians 2:3.
9. *The Beauty of Jesus*. Albert Orsbon.
10. Colossians 3:17,23.

Chapter VI

1. 1 Thessalonians 5:14.
2. This is generally true notwithstanding Bonhoeffer's agonized acceptance of a part in the Hitler plot, or the Presbyterian theology of tyrannicide, etc.
3. Colossians 3:11.

Chapter VII

1. Philippians 3:10; Corinthians 1:7.
2. Romans 8:17; Timothy 1:7,12.
3. Philippians 1:29.
4. Galatians 2:20.
5. Matthew 2:11.
6. Luke 9:23.
7. Perhaps facing an illness courageously and serenely for Christ's sake may deserve the title "bearing the cross."
8. Matthew 10:34.
9. 1 Corinthians 9:27.
10. Philippians 2:7.
11. Matthew 5:41.
12. *Take My Life, and Let It Be.* H. A. César Malan.

Chapter VIII

1. Butterfield, Herbert. *Christianity and History.* Charles Scribner's Sons. 1950.
2. The Christian principle is clear, even though it does happen occasionally that a man or a woman finds faith occasionally that a man or a woman finds faith in Christ through the love of the married partner.

Chapter X

1. Ephesians 1:17.
2. John 16:13.
3. Romans 2:14,15.
4. Psalms 87:7.
5. John 7:37-8.

Chapter XI

1. Galatians 5:1.
2. Galatians 5:5.
3. Galatians 5:13.

Chapter XII

1. *Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me.* Augustus M. Toplady.
2. Colossians 2:6.
3. *Moment by Moment.* Daniel W. Whittle.