

A Vale of Soul Making

Maurice W. Lusk, III

It was in Adam that man was created in the image of God and it was in the second Adam that the image of God was restored, but the restoration of that image must be understood as an ongoing process rather than a sudden magical event. Conversion starts the process and it is in the sojourn to the death of the human body (flesh) that the image is developed into a restoration of what it was in the beginning. This process comes in the form of a pilgrimage through the vale of soul making we know as earthly existence. Conversion, in the original language of the NT, means “turning around,” (*epistrepho*), turning to face a different direction, it is not the journey but turning to face the direction of the journey, a journey that is a walk with God.

Walking with God

From earliest times man’s journey through this life has been referred to as walking with God or walking away from God. Following is a selection of the many references to walking with God or walking in the paths of righteousness God has revealed to man.

The Patriarchal Period

*And Enoch fathered Methuselah **and walked with God** three hundred years and fathered sons and daughters; 23 And all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years; 24**Enoch walked with God** and he was not; for God took him (Gen 5:22-24).*

*These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, **and Noah walked with God** (Gen 6:9).*

*And when Abram was ninety-nine years, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; **walk before me, and be thou perfect** (Gen 17:1).*

The Children of Israel

Following the patriarchal period we see God, through Moses, continued to give instruction to man to walk with him and follow the paths he had revealed: **“You shall walk in all the ways which *Yahweh* your God has commanded you,** that you may live and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which you shall possess,” (Deut 5:3). Moses announces to the assembly of Israel: “you shall keep the commandments of *Yahweh* your God, **to walk in his ways** and to fear him,” (Deut 8:6). Before his death Moses reminded the people of Israel of the blessings and curses covenant God had made with them, “*Yahweh* shall establish you as a holy people to himself, as he has sworn unto you, if you will keep the commandments of *Yahweh* your God, and **walk in his ways,**” (Deut 28:9). Before the people of Israel crossed over the Jordan River to settle in Canaan, Joshua charges them to:

*. . . take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law, which Moses the servant of the LORD charged you, to love the LORD your God, **and to walk in all his ways,** and to keep his commandments, and to hold to him, and serve him with all your heart and with all your soul* (Joshua 22:5).

The Davidic Kingdom

The people of Israel did not remain faithful to God, to walk with him and follow his revelation to them. Some did walk with God and were blessed by their faithfulness. David, during his reign over the United Kingdom of Israel, affirms his faithfulness to God in many of his psalms:

*Judge me, O LORD; **for I have walked in integrity:** I have trusted also in the LORD; therefore I shall not slip away. ²Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins and my heart. ³For your lovingkindness is before my eyes and I have walked in your truth. For your lovingkindness is before my eyes: **and I have walked in your truth** (Psalms 26:1-3)*

Concerning the blessings God promised through Moses, David says,

*Blessed are **the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD.** 2Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart. 3They also do no iniquity; **they walk in his ways** (Psalms 119:1-3).*

God had promised David, that if his sons would walk faithfully before him he would establish “the throne of David” to his offspring, “If your children take heed to their way, **to walk before me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul**, there shall not fail you a man [to sit] on the throne of Israel (1 Kings 2:4).

Before his death, David charged his son Solomon to walk with God and following his instruction,

*Now the days of David drew near that he should die; and he charged Solomon his son, saying, 2I go the way of all the earth, be strong therefore, and show yourself a man; 3and keep the charge of the LORD your God, **to walk in his ways**, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and where you take yourself (1 Kings 2:1-3).*

As Solomon came to the throne following his father’s death God made the promise to him, “if you will **walk before me, as David your father walked**, in integrity of heart, and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded you and will keep my statutes and my judgments (1 Kings 9:4).

Falling Away of the Sons of Israel

The sad fact is that following the reign of Solomon, the sons of David did not walk with God and because of this the curses God had vowed to bring upon the children of Israel did in fact come upon them. By the year 722 BC, Israel’s walk away from God ended in destruction. As mentioned in the previous lesson, the Assyrian army

of Sargon II marched his army into the Northern Kingdom of Israel, destroyed their cities and carried off ten of the twelve tribes of Israel into Assyria and other parts of the Middle Eastern world to serve as slaves to other nations. Today, they are called “the ten lost tribes of Israel,” and the greater number of them never returned home but were absorbed into the Hellenistic culture of the Alexandrine empire. In the year 586 BC the promised curses were brought upon the Southern Kingdom of Judah, the last two tribes of Israel, were carried away into Babylon and the city of Jerusalem and Solomon’s Temple were destroyed. The blessings and curses of God’s covenant with man was fulfilled in curses over and over again.

Even though the children of Israel had forsaken God and walked in their own way, through appointed prophets God revealed that he would hear those who cried out to him and would return a remnant of the descendents of Abraham to the promised land. But this would all be contingent upon their returning to the paths God had set before them. Isaiah, a prophet of the 8th century, was given such a message from God telling Judah what they had done to bring the curses of Deuteronomy upon themselves,

*The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem; 2and it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of Adonai’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. 3And many people shall go and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Adonai, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us his ways **and we will walk in his paths**; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of Adonai from Jerusalem; 4and he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. 5 **O house of Jacob, come and let us walk in the light of Adonai,** (Isaiah 2:1-5).*

There was a remnant of Abraham’s seed that did cry out to God and returned to Jerusalem in the time of Nehemiah and Ezra. This occurred only a generation following the captivity of Judah. Over the

next three hundred years the land of Israel went in and out of occupation by foreign nations: Greece under Alexander; Syria under Antiochus; and Rome under various Caesars.

Walking with God

The theme of walking with God was kept before the people of Israel through the songs they sung; especially from the Psalms, and other wisdom writings. In Psalms 37:23 we read, "**The steps of a good man** are ordered by *Yahweh* and he delights in his way." Concerning the man who is pleasing to God, the psalmist says in verse 31, "The law of his God is in his heart; **none of his steps shall slide.**" David says of God's protection of the faithful, "Our heart is not turned back, neither **have our steps declined from your way,**" (Psalms 44:18). In a psalm of a later time, the writer, giving God thanks for restoring the Jews to their homeland, writes, "You showed favor to your land, *Adonai*; you brought back the captivity of Jacob, you forgave the iniquity of your people," (Psalms 85:1-2); in verse 4 he says, "Restore us again, O God our Savior, and put away your displeasure toward us," in verse 12, he speaks of the blessings of God, which comes **to those who walk with God,** "*Adonai* will indeed give what is good, and our land will yield its harvest," and in verse 13, "Righteousness goes before him and **prepares the way for his steps.**"

In Proverbs 4:13, Solomon, writing to his son, says, "Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is your life; and **enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men,**" and in verses 18-19, he says, "**the path of the righteous** is as the shining light that shines more and more into the fullness of day; but the way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble (Proverbs 4:13-14, 18-19). The prophet Jeremiah writes, "*Adonai*, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in **the walk of man** to direct **his steps,**" (Jer 10:23).

Walking as Jesus' Walked

The portrayal of life as a journey wherein man walks with God

is a dominant theme of the NT writings. In Peter's first letter he reminds the reader that Christ left us an example that **we should follow in his steps**, (1 Peter 2:21). In the early chapters of the Gospels, we see Jesus walking throughout Galilee, as he meets certain men he say to them, "Follow me," (Matt 4:19; 8:22; 9:9; 10:39; 16:24; 19:21; John 1:43; 8:12).

Jesus uses several metaphors or figures of speech to talk of walking with God, or walking with him in his walk before God. He claimed that he had come into the world to show the race of man how to find God and how to walk with him. He said to the people of Jerusalem, "I am the light of the world: he that follows me will not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life," (John 8:12). He says to his disciples, "Yet a little while is the light with you; walk while you have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walks in darkness knows not where he is going," (John 12:35). Man walking in the darkness is one of the most popular metaphors for man going his own way, or walking away from God (Rom 2:8; 5:16; Eph 2:2-3; 1 Tim 4:1; 5:15; Heb 4:11; 2 Peter 2:2, 10; 3:3; Jude 1:16, 18, 19).

Other similar expressions identifying one's life in Christ as a walk with God or with Christ are present throughout the NT (2 Cor 5:7; Eph 2:10; 2:2; Eph 5:2, 15; Phil 5:15, 17, 18; Col 1:10; 2:6; 4:5; 1 Thess 2:12; 4:12; 2 Thess 3:6; 3:16; 1 Peter 4:3; 2 Peter 3:3; 1 John 1:6-7; 2:6; 2 John 2:11; 2 John 1:4, 6; 3 John 1:3, 4; Jude 1:16).

Walking with God in the Letters of Paul

The theme of walking with God takes on several different images in the writings of Paul; especially, walking in newness of life, following the inner empowerment of the newly regenerated spirit within man, which is being renewed in the image of God:

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? 2God forbid; how shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein? 3Do you not know that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? 4Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death that like as Christ was

raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so **we also should walk in newness of life** (Rom 6:1-4).

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, **who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit**. **2**For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. **3**For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: **4**That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, **who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit** (Rom 8:1-4).

Let us walk properly as in the day, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. **14**Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of your flesh (Rom 13:13-14).

This I say then, **Walk in the spirit**, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. If we live in the spirit, **let us also walk in the spirit** (Gal 5:16).

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – **9**not by works, so that no one can boast. **10**For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works **that we should walk in them** (Eph 2:10).

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. **10**And we pray this in order **that you may walk worthy of the Lord** and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, (Col 1:9-10).

As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, **so walk in him**; **7**Rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving (Col 2:6-7).

You know how we exhorted, comforted, and charged every one of you,

*as a father does his children, **12That you would walk worthy of God, who has called you unto his rule and glory.**13For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which is at work in you that believe (1 Thess 2:11-13).*

Walking with God in the Writings of John

Walking with God or walking in the light or darknes is a major motif in John as well.

*. . . whosoever keeps his word, in him truly is the love of God : hereby know we that we are in him. **6He that says he abides in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked** (2 John 2:3-6).*

*It has given me great joy to find some of your children **walking in the truth**, just as the Father commanded us. **5And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. 6And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love** (2 John 1:4-6).*

*I rejoiced exceedingly at the coming of the brethren and their witness of the truth, that is that you are **walking in the truth**. **4 I rejoice exceedingly to have found that your children are walking in truth** (3 John 1:3-4).*

In contrast to the multiple references to walking with God or walking in the way God has revealed, there are also numerous references to man's refusal to walk with God and his determination to walk in his own way, which has most often led man into the darkness and enslavement to the power of sin and death.

A representation of these references are as follows: Psalms 78; 81:8-13; 82:5; Proverbs 2; 13:5-6; 14:8-12; Isaiah 30:20-21; 59:1-15; 65; Jer 3:11-25; 6:16; 7:9; 7:23-24; 9:12-14; 10:23; 11:8; 13:10; 16:11-12; 18:12; 23:14-21; Ezekiel 11:21; Amos 2:4; Malachi 3:14; John 6:66; Acts 14:16;

1 Cor 3:3; Eph 2:2; 4:17; Col 3:7; 2 Thess 3:6; 1 Peter 4:3; 2 Peter 2:9-10; 3:3; 1 John 1:6; 2:11; Jude 1:12-18; Rev 16:15).

The Vale of Soul Making

Man's walk through this life is a vale of soul-making, a journey toward the restoration of what man was when he was created in the image of God. What this means is that man's moral nature empowered by his spiritual renewal is set upon a "walk" or "journey" through the rest of his time on earth, a journey through which he fits him or herself for eternal life with God.

What we are taught by the NT is that salvation is a process, which begins at conversion to Christ and continues throughout the remainder of his or her life on earth. This is the message that prefaces the vision given to John in the final book of the NT, the book of Revelation. In the opening chapters John is told by the risen Jesus, "Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things that shall be hereafter," (1:19); the things "which are" were not the same as the things "that shall be hereafter."

Those to whom these admonitions were addressed were those who had experienced conversion to Christ; that is, they had "received the word, had been baptized, and were added to the church," to use the language of Acts 2:40-41. Those called "the church" throughout these early chapters of Revelation are repeatedly told that their journey had not been completed and there were matter in which they had not been faithful; in order to be faithful they must repent of the matters Jesus addresses.

In his message to the seven churches of Asia he says first to the church of Ephesus, "I have somewhat against you, because thou have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen, repent and do the first works; or else I will come to you quickly and remove your candlestick from its place, unless you repent," (2:4-5). He further admonishes them, "He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches; to him that overcomes (*to nikonti* - the one victorious) I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the

midst of the paradise of God," (2:7).

This scenario is found throughout the admonitions of the risen Jesus to these churches. To the church at Smyrna he says, "be faithful until to death, and I will give you a crown of life," (2:10). The Greek word translated, "until" is *achri*, an adverb of time, "until the time of," or place, "until you reach the place of." Jesus is clearly telling the church that they must be faithful until they experience death, which means that a process is involved in the pilgrimage toward eternal life.

Further, to the church at Pergamos he says that even though they had not denied their faith, he yet had a few things against them of which they must repent or else he would come against them quickly with the sword of his mouth," (2:16), but "to those who are victorious," Jesus says, "I will give to eat of the hidden manna and will give him a white stone and in the stone a new name written that no man knows except the one who receives it," (2:17). The goal of at the end of the sojourn is contingent on the faithfulness of the one making the journey.

To the church of Thyatira he admonishes, "what you have hold fast till I come, the one that overcomes and keeps my works unto the end, I will give authority over the nations," (2:25-26). To the church of Sardis he says, "I know your works, that you have a name that you live and are dead, be watchful, and strengthen the things remaining which are about to die: for I have not found your works to have been completed before God." His admonition to them is to remember what they had received and heard and kept it and repent. Then he further says,

You have a few names even in Sardis that have not defiled their garments and they shall walk with me in white for they are worthy. The one overcoming in similar manner shall be clothed in white garments and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels (3:4-5).

To the church of Philadelphia he says, "I know your works: behold, I have set before you an open door and no one can shut it

because you have a little strength and have kept my word and have not denied my name," (3:8). Then there is the church of Laodicea to whom he says, "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I would that you were cold or hot; therefore, because you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spit you out of my mouth," (3:15-16).

The message to these churches concludes with the following:

Behold, I have stood at the door and I knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come in to him and will eat with him and he with me. To the one overcoming will I give to sit with me in my throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my Father in his throne. Anyone having an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches (3:20-22).

Here we come to the conclusion warranted by the words of Jesus revealed to John. Those making up the seven churches to whom these admonitions were address are those who had been converted to Christ and were added to the *ekklesia* - his church (Acts 2:47). There is no once saved always saved teaching to found anywhere in these words. Rather, what is taught is just the opposite. It is clear from what we read here that those converted to Christ are then set upon a journey toward a goal or destination; a walk with God.

Conclusion

The goal of the walk through the vale of soul-making is the restoration of the image of God in which man was created and the destination of the journey is eternal life for those who have become new creations in Christ and have been faithful until death. At death the spirit having been created anew in Christ will return to God to await the new creation of the body (or flesh), which will be transformed into a glorious body as was the body of Christ, as Paul discusses at length in 1 Cor 15:35-57.

Paul addresses the pilgrimage through this life repeatedly in the bulk of his letters. Central to this emphasis is the conflict that now exists between the flesh (the Adamic nature) and the human spirit (the new creation nature) of our existence. Admonitions to faithfulness, to overcoming the flesh, to walking in the light abound in the letters.

The simple observation of the typical Christian following conversion to Christ suggests that not much changes in terms of moral character in the period following conversion. One's moral character is subject to volition or free will. There is no usurpation of the will of man by the Holy Spirit following conversion. This, however, is often the expectation of the new Christian. He or she is sometimes under the impression that they will experience a sensation of floating or some kind of inner illumination and will be transformed as was Jesus on the mount in Luke 9:28-36.

The truth of the matter is that God meets man where he finds him. The changes that will occur are the result of one's will to change and the maturation process of the personality. If one is familiar with the Kohlberg model for the stages of moral development, he or she will have some knowledge of how the development of moral character occurs. One's thinking is informed by his or her belief system and experiences in life. As a new convert one's new way of seeing things will be an essential part of this growth process.

Further, there is the presence of moral empowerment as an indwelling force within the believer that may be called upon at the will of the believer. This moral indwelling of the presence of God is related to what has happened to the spirit of man in conversion. It is what has happened to his spirit in conversion, not another spirit that has usurped his spirit or assumed his responsibilities. Paul admonishes in Phil 2:12, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," and this is all the more significant when one realizes that he or she is walking through a vale of soul-making fitting him or herself for eternity.

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