

SOMETHING TO CHEW ON

Of the scores of patients they had seen in their African missionary clinic that morning, none presented a more woeful sight than a young Yoruba farmer. Supported by anxious relatives, he limped into the examining room, reluctant to bear his weight on the swollen, ulcerated left leg from which the remnant of a slender, white guinea worm protruded. His rapid breathing seemed almost a conscious effort. Even his deeply-pigmented skin could not conceal the wanness of his severe anæmia which was the cause of his air hunger and racing pulse. Before he was admitted to the hospital, the laboratory microscope had revealed that there were three other parasites inwardly preying upon him, in addition to the one they had already seen at his ankle.

The tragedy of this pathetic scene was deepened by the knowledge that this man's condition was wholly preventable. Had he not drunk the polluted water from the sluggish stream near his farm, the metre long guinea worm would not have tormented him. A pair of simple, inexpensive sandals would have protected him from the hookworms that had penetrated his bare feet and were relentlessly sapping his blood and strength. A few minutes regularly spent in washing his soiled hands before meals might have spared him the abdominal discomfort that constantly gnawed within.

Fortunately, the medical staff had a satisfactory treatment for all his ailments, medicines that would not only relieve him of his pain, but would help to restore him to health as well. But, unless he were somehow taught a new way of life, this illiterate person would return, no wiser than before, sick again, and still only half a man. This unfortunate son of the soil needed to understand that by following certain rules he might avoid further inroads on his health, and become a whole man - strong, vigorous, productive, and happy. To be sure, he needed curative medicine to help undo the results of past violations of the laws of health, but, beyond this, there was the greater need of preventive medicine that would teach him to walk the path of obedience leading to vibrant health.

From the African village we take a long leap across an ocean to a large modern city and find another kind of man - a man perhaps like Paul G—. Unlike the simple, unlettered farmer, Paul is well-schooled, and equally well-tailored, somewhat of a sophisticate, a successful businessman, and a member of the church. The newsboy, the office lift operator, the out-of-town client - in fact, almost everyone - knows that Paul has a hair-trigger temper. Aside from his certain shortcomings, however, he is a solid citizen and a regular communicant at his church. Only the pastor and the church treasurer know that he hasn't paid his tithe in the past six months, and no one has the slightest suspicion that he has been dishonest to the point of embezzlement of large sums of company funds. Yes, Paul is a different kind of patient, but a patient nonetheless, not sick with a physical malady but afflicted with a far more deadly disorder - sin.

Paul needs the cure, and he needs it desperately. Happily, there is a remedy available - a true panacea that will heal the most rebellious will, the most selfish spirit, the most unregenerate heart. The Scriptures are emphatic. "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin ... If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:7-9. This universal antidote for sin is justification by faith in the atoning blood of Christ. Freely received, it provides full remission for sins of the past, and allows Paul G—, or any sinner, to stand before his Maker, and all men, as a new creature, blameless.

But after the healing balm of justification has been applied, what of the future? What is to prevent avarice, anger, lust, or pride from again overwhelming our man, and reducing him to a spiritual invalid once more? This is the role of preventive Christianity, to provide within this new creature in Christ a resistance to sin, a spiritual immunity. Each twice-born person must realize that the same Jesus who said to him, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," also says, "Go, and sin no more". The forgiven sinner must believe that the words of Jude 24 are a specific promise to him - that Christ is able to keep him from falling and to present him faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. Sanctification is more than a theological concept; it is a genuine Christian reality, possible to each one who has once been delivered from the guilt of sin through justification and who sincerely desires that the same spiritual forces might be active daily, hourly, to deliver him from the power of sin.

Sanctification is not a passive transformation, but a process requiring the active co-operation and participation of the believer. There are rules for preventive Christianity just as there are rules for maintaining buoyant physical health. The basic principle that underlies these rules is found in John 15:5. "I am the Vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." This living, vital connection with Christ is the only surety that anyone may have of protection from the deadly virus of sin that has reached pandemic proportions in our present world. The rules for physical health are known to every schoolboy - a wholesome diet, fresh air, exercise, rest, and an abundance of clean water within and without. The rules for spiritual health are no more complex or profound. They have to do with the techniques of maintaining this constant effectual communion with Christ, the source of all spiritual strength. The rules are, in fact, so elementary that Paul G——, indeed any one of us, might wonder if the secret of victorious living can be so simple. Well let us look at the rules and see for ourselves.

1. "Pray without ceasing." 1 Thessalonians 5:17. Jesus expressed this same thought when he said, "Men ought always to pray." Luke 18:1. Our Saviour could say this, because he knew that communion with his divine Father was his bulwark against sin. Away from the multitudes, in the solitude of the garden or in the quiet grandeur of the mountains, he sought, and found, the power which enabled him to be "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Hebrews 4:15. Jesus taught us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." And he will deliver us, for he would not ask us to pray for that which God cannot, or will not, supply.

2. "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." 2 Timothy 2:15. Man must be armed with "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God" Ephesians 6:17. When Jesus was assailed by his temptation in the wilderness, it was the Scriptures that he used to repel his temptations. Each of the three great temptations was met with the same "it is written," and each time the temptation went. Such victory may be ours through the Word.

Those who would overcome sin must learn to hate it. This the Bible can teach us, for in its sacred pages one can trace the terrible consequences of rebellion and see the heinous character of sin through the awesome price that it cost Christ to atone for that rebellion. More than this, however, the Bible holds the key to every spiritual dilemma. It has truth to answer every deception, light to dispel every shadow, and strength to subdue every evil

passion. It was the psalmist who said, "Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee." Psalm 119:11.

3. "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations." Matthew 28:19. Christian service is the natural, inevitable outgrowth of prayer and study of the Word. One who truly has an abiding relationship with Christ will be constrained to say with Paul, "I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the barbarians; both to the wise and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel." Romans 1:14,15.

There must be time for reflection and self-examination, for communion and study, but we must not be hermits shut off from those to whom we are called to be ambassadors of the cross. The commission, "Go ye," is to all. As we answer to its call to be co-labourers with the Master, many of the allurements of the world lose their charm, and we become lost to selfish aims and absorbed in the same noble task to which Christ gave his all - the revelation of the character and will of God to men. These are the three essentials of preventive Christianity, of victorious living and sanctification - prayer, study of the Scriptures, and service for others. Through these habitual acts of devotion we may enter into such an intimate relationship with Christ that his never-failing strength will become our strength, and through him we shall become a part of that "glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing," Ephesians 5:27. In Christ there is preventive power abundant and free to keep us from falling.