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"MAKE STRAIGHT PATHS FOR YOUR FEET"

– HEBREWS 12:13. –

WHEN the Apostle says, "Make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way," what does he mean? He does not mean that we should literally shovel a path smooth, nor does he refer to our literal feet. All will agree to this. Evidently the Apostle's teaching is that each one of the Lord's sheep has more or less of earthly blemish (imperfection), in consequence of which lameness it is difficult for him to make steady progress in the footsteps of our Lord. He urges that as we find out what our weaknesses are, physical and mental, we should endeavor to shape our course of life accordingly, so as to be able to overcome the difficulties of the way and the besetments of the Adversary. We make the straight paths by choosing such a course as will not unnecessarily aggravate and excite our weaknesses, and thus make us the more lame. We are to seek to overcome the lameness, and, to do so, are not only to pray, "Abandon us not in temptation," but are to seek to avoid the temptations in all ways. How do we do this? We answer, by the exercise of our wills, or determination – by mental resolutions; or, in other words, by making [R4348 : page 76] vows or solemn promises to the Lord respecting our determinations to take the proper course. Anyone, therefore, who has followed the Apostle's injunction in our text has made vows to the Lord, which he should be faithful in performing, if he would come off a victor and have the Divine approval.

The Lord does not lay these vows upon us, commanding us to do thus, and not to do so. This would be placing us under law and would hinder us from offering sacrifices as an antitypical priesthood. Only in general terms, therefore, does the Lord speak to his people, indicating to them the right path and leaving to them

the matter of making their vows, according to their necessities, and paying their vows, and thus making progress in grace and knowledge and in character development. Whoever has not seen his need of making resolutions, making vows to the Lord, has not recognized the first principle of Christian development. He who finds from the Enemy's attack where his wall is weakest, and who then repairs the weak places as quickly as ascertained, does so by resolution to the Lord – by vows. He who has not discovered any weaknesses in his character is duly blind and "cannot see afar off." He who has not attempted to correct his weaknesses by resolutions to the Lord, vows to the Lord, has not yet begun that character development which must be completed before he can be pronounced an overcomer.

Let us here present two dialogues bearing upon this question of character development by the aid of vows or resolutions: –

Bro. A – Have you taken the Vow recently suggested to us in the WATCH TOWER?

Bro. B – No. It seems to me that however useful it may be to others, it would not be so for me.

A – Does the old man rebel against being tied down too tightly?

B – I hope that is not the case. It seems to me that I already am doing practically everything that is stipulated in the Vow, and hence, that I need not take it. With reference to the first section, of praying for God's will to more thoroughly control my life, I already do that. Section two I already observe to the full – remembering my dear colaborers in the Harvest Work every day and striving to appreciate more fully my own privileges in it. As for section three, I certainly strive daily to scrutinize thoughts and words and actions, as I believe that every Christian should do. How can we do otherwise? Referring to section four, I long ago

resolved to have nothing to do with Occultism or Spiritism, recognizing them as having to do with the Adversary. I have long observed the spirit of this section and, I might say, its letter also, with the exception of the reference to being in a room alone with one of the opposite sex, with the door wide open. I have not always followed that plan, but am free to confess that it would be a very good general rule to follow, and that it would save many people from trouble and, perhaps, be advantageous to myself.

A – Why, Brother B, as I understand you, you have already taken these various parts of the Vow as mental resolutions to the Lord, in their spirit, if not in their letter. The difference seems to be that you have made separate vows of each point, whereas the WATCH TOWER has aggregated these various points into one Vow!

B – Perhaps that is a proper way of stating the matter and yet, understand me, I have not bound myself as respects the future, but merely have this ideal before my mind as a proper course; then, as each case comes before the bar of my judgment, I decide it on its own merits entirely, and accordingly, if you please, resolve respecting that one case, or vow respecting that one case, that I will follow such a course.

A – I see; but, dear Brother, that course gives you a whole lot of vowing many times a day, and gives you the bother of deciding many times a day. It may be that you have an extraordinarily well-balanced mind and that you have little difficulty in recognizing the line of principle in all of life's affairs, thus being able to decide each little question as it comes to you quickly, promptly, correctly, and that your mind is not liable to swerve from the principles of righteousness, even under pressure of temptations. If so, I can see that your plan of testing each little question as it comes and vowing or resolving on each point, and thus making many vows for one day, may, perhaps, be a safe enough plan for you, but

would that plan be the safest and best for everybody, do you think? Surely you and I know some of God's dear people who are not very quick in their application of principles and doctrines to the affairs of life, some who are quite likely to be a little unbalanced and swerved in the presence of temptations. Would it not be wise for such to make their vows with cool deliberation, in harmony with the Divine will, when not beset with temptation, and thus to guide their footsteps, not merely for that day and moment, but for all the future days of life? Would not this be in full accord with the Apostle's exhortation of our text, "Make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way"? Further, dear brother, if you already are recognizing these principles in your daily life, are you not leaving open a door to the Adversary, through which some time he might intrude upon you and pervert your judgment, under some kinds of temptation which we cannot now surmise in detail?

If you are already bound by the principles which obtain in this Vow, as you admit, would it not be fastening on the armor, as it were, for you to take the Vow and thus relieve yourself from an interminable amount of consideration, questioning and deciding left to be done at the most unguarded and unfavorable moment, when the Enemy is before you, with his temptations? Besides, dear brother, as St. Paul declares himself willing to resolve or vow to eat no more meat, if thereby he would help a weaker brother, would not that be a valuable consideration for us in respect to this Vow, and an assistance to us in determining what we would best do to help the brethren, especially if we perceive that the Enemy is assaulting the flock, and particularly when we remember **[R4349 : page 76]** that it is a part of our covenant with the Lord, not only to assist the brethren in so slight a matter as this, but, if necessity calls for it, to lay down our lives for them?

Brother C, what do you think of the Vow? Have you declared or subscribed it to the Lord as yours? Is it your solemn resolution

before the Lord that you will follow the various points outlined in the suggested Vow?

C – No; I have not taken it. I confess that I am afraid of it – fearful that I could not keep it.

A – Why, dear brother, I am surprised at your expression. Did I not understand aright that you had made a full consecration of your life, your rights, your liberties, your all, to the Lord, even unto death? If so, that Vow, or Resolution, which you probably also symbolized in baptism, and which, therefore, is termed your baptismal Vow, is still upon you and is all-comprehensive? If you can keep that Vow, you certainly will have little trouble in keeping the Vow suggested in the WATCH TOWER. Tell us, please, what features seem to you so burdensome, so impossible? Surely not the first? **[R4349 : page 77]**

C – No; I desire, surely, God's will to rule more and more in my heart and in my mortal body.

A – Well, surely it is not the second point of the Vow which you object to – so surely as you are consecrated to the Lord and enjoying the light of the present harvest work and your own privileges in connection with it and all the dear colaborers! You surely remember these every day, or ought to. You are surely losing a blessing, if you do not do so. I advise that you so resolve at once and that you note carefully the blessing that will thus come to you, as you think about the work of the Lord and his people and your own harvest privileges and opportunities. Quite a good many report that they are having blessings along this very line – that as they think daily of their privileges in the harvest field, it strengthens their resolutions and gives them courage to thrust in the sickle of Truth. Tell me, dear brother, that you do not oppose, but fully endorse that feature of the Vow.

C – Well, of course, when you put it that way, I agree partly. But suppose that I should fail some day to thus think and pray, either because of forgetfulness or because of sickness, or what not?

A – If you should be delirious or lie unconscious, so that you could neither think nor pray, you would not be responsible. Likewise, if, in spite of your very best endeavor or resolution, the matter slipped your mind, you would not be responsible, because no man can do beyond his ability, and the Vow expressly declares for things that are *reasonably possible* by God's assisting grace. However, after taking the Vow you would assuredly find yourself living in that higher atmosphere in which you would be as unlikely to forget the harvest work and colaborers, as to forget your meals. More and more it would become a part of your very life, and help to raise your thoughts from the things of earth to the heavenly things and to reset frequently your affections on the things which are above. Look, now, at the third section of the Vow. Surely, dear Brother C, there is nothing in that section which your heart would not approve. Have you not already resolved to God and vowed to him to scrutinize your thoughts and words and doings, with a view to better service to him and to the brethren? I surely hope so, dear brother, for otherwise how could I think of you as a consecrated Christian at all?

C – Oh! yes. I agree to it that that is all very fine, but can I watch every thought and word and act?

A – Remember, dear brother, that you, the New Creature, have an enemy very close to you all the time – your old self. That old self would like to have you, the New Creature, off guard, so that you would not so carefully scrutinize every thought, every word, every act. It is that old self that is now fighting the Vow and saying, "Don't bind me any tighter, I have little enough liberty now." You must not mind what the old man says, dear brother.

Listen, instead, for the Lord's voice. Through the Apostle, he tells us to kill the old man. "Mortify, therefore, your members, which are upon the earth." (Col. 3:5.) A large part of your difficulty, dear brother, and of the difficulties of all who seek to walk in the narrow way, is that the old man cries out and wants to retain liberty and life, but it is contrary to the interests of the New Creature that any attention should be paid to it. Tell him at once that you thought that he was dead and buried long ago, and are only finding out to the contrary now, and that by this Vow you intend to kill him outright and screw down his coffin-lid. It is your old man that does not like the Vow, dear brother, and not you, the New Creature, who must certainly approve it as being a help to yourself and to all the dear household of faith.

Brother C, I understand that you said some very unkind things in respect to those who took the Vow – that you both thought evil and spoke evil, and acted in an improper manner. Dear Brother, this was surely not you, the New Creature, but the old creature, in command. How beneficial it would have been to you had you taken the Vow, and thus have impressed upon your mind a careful scrutiny of your every thought and word and act! It is useless for us to pray, "Abandon us not unto temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One," if, when the Lord shows us how we may ward off temptation and put a barrier between the Evil One and ourselves, we refuse to heed his counsel.

I cannot think that the fourth part of the Vow is impossible to you, dear Brother C, nor that you really consider it unwise, in view of what we know of our Adversary and his various wiles, and in view of what the Scriptures tell us of his greater power in the closing of this Harvest time; you surely would not consider it wise to be careless in respect to the particular traps which we recognize are already set and baited for the world and for the Church during "the hour of temptation" which is now upon the whole world. Surely you are agreed that there are only two Captains, the Lord

and the Adversary, and that it is a part of our duty, if we would be faithful soldiers of the cross, to oppose Satan's tactics and devices in every way, shape and form, do you not?

C – Surely so, dear Brother A. And I believe that I can think of no objection on that score, either.

A – Now, Brother C, we are to the last paragraph of the Vow. Your objection must be here, or you have none. What is the objection? You say you are afraid you cannot keep it. My thought, dear brother, is the very reverse – that you need not be afraid if you do not keep it. Are you afraid that you cannot conduct yourself always toward those of the opposite sex in private, as you do in public, in the presence of the Lord's people? If you have weaknesses along that line, dear brother, it is the very point which you need to fortify by just such a Vow as this.

C – I fear that I should forget, or that, if I remembered, I would not be equal to the test.

A – Dear brother, it is the New Creature that would make this Vow. The old creature would never make it. The New Creature resolves to do its best, resolves to God that, to the best of its ability, it will follow this course. And God says to the New Creature in return, "My grace is sufficient for thee; my strength is made perfect in weakness." What remains in the way, dear brother? Nothing, except it be a lack of faith on your part to accept the necessary grace and strength, or unless it be a lack of determination, which would mean a lack of consecration, which would imply that you were living in neglect of your original consecration vow, or baptismal vow. By all means, dear brother, remedy this matter. Exercise faith and determination to keep your original covenant, to keep your human will dead. This Vow will undoubtedly assist you in the carrying out of such a determination, and, if so, it will help you to make your calling and election sure.

Without such a determination, apparently, you could never make it sure.

Now, for the last clause of the Vow. What is the objection here? Is there any?

C – My pride objects a little to the suggestion, though I acknowledge that the arrangement would be a safeguard and that, under its operation, no doubt, many would be preserved [R4349 : page 78] from indiscretions whose tendencies might not be spiritual, and might even be toward carnality.

A – Well, my dear Brother C, your two arguments in opposition are the strongest arguments in favor of the Vow. If you have any pride on the subject, mortify it, deaden it. "Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God." Do it for the sake of others, if not for your own sake, though you admit that you have need of it for your own sake. As for the second point you make, surely that is an argument in favor of the Vow. It is a barricade, coming between the Lord's people and special temptation. If it should save from injury only one for whom Christ died, would it not be worth while for us all to take the Vow? But I assure you, dear Brother C, that I have information which leads me to think that hundreds of the Lord's people would be safeguarded by that Vow, and be nearer to the Lord, more closely "Under the shadow of his wings," and, consequently, farther from the great Adversary, the Fowler of Psalm 91. I urge you, dear brother, to take the Vow, not as a new one, for your original vow of consecration was all-inclusive. It is positive. This Vow is in a sense negative. In this Vow we formulate a list of some of the things we will not do, because we believe that by their avoidance we would be brought nearer to the Lord and separated from the power of the Adversary, and be ready more fully to render assistance to the brethren, who, with ourselves, are struggling up Zion's Hill in the narrow way.

Do not take the Vow to please Brother Russell, nor as **[R4350 : page 78]** a fetish or charm to ward off the Adversary, but take it intelligently, as unto the Lord, and throw your influence in favor of it to all the dear brethren in Christ. There is a blessing in it, and the quicker you take it, the quicker you will share in that blessing, which many others are already confessing. "Make straight paths for your feet."

