

Things Consider

- ▶ An obvious thing we can do to assist us to 'walk our talk', but which we often forget, is to ask for God's help! We must genuinely want His help, even if at times we are not quite so sure. He *will* help us, which is not to say we will not struggle and sometimes be 'two-minded' about wanting that help. (Romans 7,19) Sometimes in relation to a particular issue, we may prefer our own way, not God's. Our prayer can be like St Augustine's: 'Lord, help me to stop sinning; but not yet'. However, our general intention is good. There may be moments when we want our own way, but over the years, we really do want to bend towards God as a tree bends in the wind and is slowly shaped through time.
- ▶ A second thing that we can do is to pray for each person with whom we have a conversation during the day, even if that conversation was brief. It only needs to be a short prayer for this person, (1 Thessalonians 5.17): their needs and struggles in life, that God will touch them in some way that draws them to Him or deepens an already existing relationship. Yet there is also another dimension. In the Beatitudes, Jesus said, 'Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God'. (Matthew 5.8) I believe this can be understood as us trying to see God in everyone that we meet and when we do this then we will be truly blessed!
- ▶ 'Walking our talk' is a journey of trial and error, not about trying to be perfect. We will make mistakes and God will understand, help, and guide us. With time and effort, a *sincerity* will begin to emerge and I deliberately phrase it that way. We can be a little uncomfortable with sincerity and feel a sense of unease when someone says that 'so and so is sincere' or even that we are! Francois Fénelon (1651-1715) in his book *Christian Perfection* writes that sincerity is a necessary and important stage in our development for we are sincerely trying hard and want our inner and outer life to be authentic. The problem, he says, is we are trying too hard, we still always have one eye on the self, and we are not yet truly at ease with ourselves. We should not despise this; we are on the way; we have made progress. At this point, we all just need encouragement and time to blossom and mature.

AtG/B16/MBH

Attending to God

'Walking our Talk'

Part Two



For numbers of people in the wider community Christianity is understood as being to do with morality. It is about rule keeping. It is about being good, upright citizens in our communities and staying out of trouble, particularly with the law.

I want to suggest to you that this is not what Christianity is, but that rather it is about having a living, loving relationship with God the Father, in Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit. Through this, it has a deepening vitality about it, which finds expression through our love for our neighbour in concrete ways. It is not one aspect or the other; it is both. It is both God and our neighbour (Matthew 22.36-40).

To express this with an illustration: Because of my marriage to my wife that speaks of my love and commitment to her, I want to live my life in such a way that demonstrates this in practice and is life giving for us both. In its broadest sense, the moral dimension follows on from my love and commitment to her. It is always secondary to my love and commitment, but nonetheless is important. In short I do need to 'walk my talk' and be seen to be doing so, otherwise my love and commitment, the foundation, is a nonsense.

There are those who would wish to reduce this moral dimension to the personal, private level, but I believe this is wrong. I strongly suggest that there is a corporate dimension. It is not just simply me being faithful in my marriage, but more broadly, about my not cheating in some way, my employees or those to whom I provide a service. It can be trying to provide a voice for the voiceless in our society, to not 'grind them down'. It is to name and try to change unjust systems that lead to oppression in one form or another. 'Walking our talk' means doing so at every level in life. It means not being tricky in our dealings and relationships with others. It means 'going that extra mile'. In short, Christianity is not simply God and me; it affects my life with my neighbour. (1 John 2.9-11; 4.20-21)

In his book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* Stephen Covey tells how in recent years there has been a shift from what he calls the *Character Ethic* to the *Personality Ethic*. By the former he means things such as 'integrity, humility, fidelity, temperance, courage, justice, patience, industry, simplicity, modesty, and the Golden Rule'. By the latter, the *Personality Ethic*, he means 'attitudes and behaviours, skills and techniques that lubricate the processes of human interaction'. Put simply it relates to things like the winning smile and looking the person in the eye. To reduce this to clichés: I do not believe this shift in behaviour is 'walking our talk'; if anything, it is trying for the 'quick fix'.

Because we live in the world, we will struggle at times with all aspects of this. In summary, sometimes we will act through ignorance, sometimes we will get it wrong, and sometimes, for whatever reason, we will act sinfully. In saying this, I don't mean to make excuses, but simply to state the reality of all our lives. (Romans 7.19-20)

Sometimes even without realising it we will be too accommodating of the world and its values. We need to learn to be aware how the way the world of marketing works, how language is manipulated, how we are being manipulated by the media to hold a view on everything, particularly with the bias they try to thrust on us. (Often we are not in a position to judge because we are not privy to all the facts.) Part of 'walking our talk' is to hold our views thoughtfully and with integrity. In addition, we don't need to have a view on everything.

A key word in the Christian lexicon is that word *repentance*. (Matthew 4.17) Truly repenting is something we need to do each day. It is spiritually healthy and healing and leads to humility, as we are constantly being reminded that we are of the earth. (The word 'humility' derives from *humus* meaning 'of the earth'.) We cannot save ourselves. Only God can.

This is also a gentle reminder that unfortunately Christians can be very judgemental of others. Sadly, there can be a sense of ill will in this at times. In fact numbers would see Christians as being people who are simply very judgemental of others and who wish their disapproval to be known. It is like gossiping; the person gossiping is trying to say, 'I would never be like that. I am better than this person.' We all do ourselves and the Christian faith a great disservice when we behave in this way. Jesus reminded us not to be judgemental when he said, 'Do not judge, so that you may not be judged.' (Matthew 7.1) Of course, we do have to make judgements; even Jesus did. But making judgements is not being judgemental. That is to condemn (John 8.10-11) and we should not engage in it.

'Walking our talk' should not be a situation where we have to just 'grit our teeth' and get on with it. No, it should be joyous and life giving; it should be something that is one of the hallmarks of the Christian and which others, particularly non-Christians, find attractive in us. It is one way in which we can live out God's mission. (Matthew 28.19-20)

Summed up, there needs to be a transparency and authenticity about us that shines through our life that others find attractive and to which they are drawn. (Matthew 5.16) People then can see that our inner life is matched to our outer life. We are 'walking our talk'!