

Sailing With Paul

Simple Papers for Young Christians

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~ 1953 ~

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A Non-Profit Organization, Devoted to the Lord's Work and to the spread of His Truth

19 West 21st Street

New York 10, N.Y.

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Chapter 14

Books, Companionships and Recreation

Paul was not an ascetic. He was a sane, healthy, all-round man, intensely devoted to the One who had saved him. He loved books, he enjoyed congenial company, he recognized the profit to be derived from temperate recreation. He has, by the SPIRIT's inspiration, left on record enough on all these lines to serve as a guide to young believers who may be somewhat perplexed at times as to where the line should be drawn, between what would glorify GOD and be a means of blessing to their own souls, and that would dishonor Him and hinder spiritual growth.

The writings and addresses of Paul show that he was a widely-read and well-informed man. He loved books; when he was in prison the second time, in a Roman dungeon, he longed for books. He wrote to Timothy, "**bring . . . the books, but especially the parchments**" (II Timothy 4:13). What these books were we have now no means of knowing; but let him make it a rule that he gives his time only to what will edify.

"Be a man of one book!" wrote Wesley. But he was himself a voluminous reader. What he meant was that the Bible should have the central place, and all other books should be read as subservient to it. If the Scriptures are not neglected, but thoughtfully read and meditated upon, one's spiritual judgment will soon become sufficiently clarified to enable him to discern what other books can be read with edification. Trashy novels, light, frivolous literature, anything unclean and unholy, the godly soul will instinctively shrink from. But Paul shows himself familiar with the history, science and poetry of his day. He refers on occasion to historical events; he illustrates by the use of scientific facts; he quotes, when in keeping with his theme, what "**certain also of your own poets**" have said, and in this we need not fear to follow him, if there be in us but the heart for CHRIST there was in him.

It is to be feared that many young Christians have been hindered by a hard legal spirit on this very line. All reading has been tabooed that was not exactly spiritual. This is a grave mistake, and leads to extreme narrowness of mind, and even positively hinders mental development, thus

restricting one's ability to enjoy what GOD Himself has given us in His word. "Reading makes a full man," is an old saying that is worthy of remembrance; only be careful to "take forth the precious from the vile."

And now, a word as to companionships. Paul enjoyed association with others. He loved fellowship. He appreciated friends; but his friends were among the people of GOD. To an Aquila or a Priscilla he could pour out his heart, and could enjoy to the full their tender affection. but, you may be sure, he never was fond lounging about with an Elymas or even a Gallio! And right here is where many a young saint is not faithful. There is no clean cut with the world. Old companionships are still sought and enjoyed. No wonder there is little or no growth; no wonder there are so many stunted Christians. "**Come out from among them, and be ye separate,**" is the Word of the Lord to all who are dilly-dallying with the world after confessing CHRIST; for "**the friendship of the world is enmity with God.**" Find your friends among the friends of CHRIST! Let your companions be those who love His name; and then be careful not to let good fellowship degenerate into careless levity. For here, too, many young believers break down.

This is very commonly the case where young persons of opposite sexes mingle much together. There is no reason why Christian youths and maidens should not meet and enjoy one another's company in a pure and holy way. But often it is far otherwise. If you feel there is a snare in such commingling, then be honest with your own souls, and faithfully avoid what might dishonor CHRIST and hinder spiritual growth. Timothy was exhorted to treat elder brethren with the reverence due to fathers, young men as brethren, elder women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with all purity (I Timothy 5:1, 2). The last three words are important, and if overlooked, will lead to many a snare: "**with all purity.**"

Young people need recreation; old ones, too, for that matter. It is a mistake to suppose the body and mind must always be keyed up to serious pursuits. "**Bodily exercise profiteth little**" - not a great deal, but a "**little.**" Therefore beware of giving it an undue place; but do not neglect it. And in all your recreation see that there is nothing that hinders godliness, for godliness is of profit both in this life and the next.

Any one in reading the epistles can observe that in Paul's many references to athletics, there is no suggestion that he in any way disapproves of the exercise in itself. The dangers are two: first, associations; second, excess. Be "**temperate in all things,**" and be as careful of your companions in your recreation as in the other affairs of life.

Unduly rigid persons often forget young men and women have bodies to be cared for and developed in a healthful way. On the other hand, pleasure-lovers forget they have immortal souls, of infinitely more importance than the body in which they dwell. Seek therefore to be a well-balanced Christian, putting first things first; and as to minor matters, ever keeping CHRIST's glory in view. And if you are enabled to have a healthy soul in a healthy body, see that you use your strength for Him who for our sakes "**endured the cross, despising the shame.**" "**Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom,**" and thus you will be enabled to "**do all to the glory of God.**"

~ end of chapter 14 ~