

meant by self-denial? It means the steadfast acting on principle. It means the crossing of one's inclinations when they run counter to his sense of right and duty, or it may be, ultimate advantage. It means training and self-discipline, that self-discipline which makes a man endure hardness for the sake of some worthy object. It means living not by mere chance, haphazard, impulse, but by rule. It enters into everything that a man does; it makes him regular and punctual, it makes him orderly and methodical, it makes him resist the temptation to sloth and dawdling and the waste of time and energy. It means the power of enduring contradiction, disappointment, pain. These are the principles on which, and on which alone, we can discipline ourselves, and fashion our lives aright; on which alone we can form, in ourselves or others, a character which will stand us instead when it is called upon to act, and which will be trusted by man and acceptable to God.

This involves, of course, *living by rule*, which is one of the chief forms of self-denial. And by this phrase we do not mean that the whole of a man's life is to be a series of actions prompted merely by a formal precept. Such a life would have no real unity and so no real power. There must be, underlying all our thoughts and words and deeds, a sense of the high purpose of life, the sense of a principle which contains all rules within itself, which is ever ready, so to speak, to promulgate a law when the occasion comes on which it should be obeyed. In this sense, we say that the Gospel of Christ is not a system of precepts, but a living principle which, when consciously realized, does not fail a man when he needs direction and guidance for conduct. Yet, on the other hand, the man who lives under the dominion of the ideas and principles of Christ, will in the course of

his life and spiritual education, have shaped for himself, rules for the application of those principles to the actual business of life. The rule of truthfulness, of uprightness, of the punctual discharge of duties, of the careful keeping of engagements—the rule of subordinating recreation to labour, of preventing amusement from passing over into dissipation—rules like these will be present to his mind and will come with promptness to his aid in moments of temporary doubt and indecision. They may not be hard and fast rules in all cases, although the greater of them must be so, but they will always set forth the general line which should be followed in the conduct of life.

A very important point in this connexion is the influence of reading and *companionship*; and, in a certain sense, these two are one. Our books are our companions and friends, as well as our fellow men. On this point some thing may be said hereafter. At present we restrict ourselves to human companionship.

It is an old conviction that he that walketh with wise men shall be wise, while the companions of fools shall be destroyed. It is impossible to over-rate the gravity of this subject. It is seen among men of all classes and of all ages. Of course its influence is greatest when people are young and when they are comparatively uneducated. It is seen in families: a bad child has often corrupted a whole household. It is seen in schools. Two or three bad boys have sometimes brought great schools to the very brink of ruin. It is seen in Society. Some men raise the tone of all with whom they come into contact, whilst the lowering influence of others is equally conspicuous. There are cases in which we cannot choose our associations to any great extent. But these are not the instances with which we are here principally dealing. We