

The Walk of Holiness

This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But ye have not so learned Christ; If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

(Eph 4:17-24)

When you hear the word ‘holiness’, what comes into your mind? Some immediately think of heaviness - a sombre, heavy code of morals; a strict keeping of rules. Others think of ritualism. They hear ‘holiness’ and they think of incense, stained glass windows, and men wearing robes and looking very pious. Others hear ‘holiness’ and they think strangeness, like some of the communities that dress sombrely and exist without electricity. Some Christians even have a mixture of these ideas.

Holiness can really be summed up in one simple word – Christlikeness. There is no difference between holiness and Christlikeness. The word ‘holy’ has the idea of uniqueness. When the seraphim cry out ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty’, they are crying out ‘Unique, unique, unique is the Lord God’. God’s holiness is all His attributes summed up together that cause Him to be set apart from His creation. It includes His moral purity, His love, His mercy, His power, His wisdom, His presence, His eternality, his unchanging nature. God is absolutely unique and supreme.

God’s greatest communication of Himself to us came in the form of His Son Jesus Christ (Heb 1:3) When God wanted humans to know what is knowable of Himself, the Son of God became a man. Jesus Christ reflected to us all that we need to know, or are capable of knowing, in the Father. So Christlikeness is the holiness of God in human form. When God calls on us to be holy, He is not calling on us to be things that only He can be – like omnipresent, omnipotent, all-knowing, unchanging, eternal. He is calling on us to be as much like Him as a human can be – which is to be Christlike. Our Lord Jesus was fully God and fully man. As the theologians put it: *He was undiminished deity and perfect humanity united in one Person forever*. So therefore, imitating Jesus Christ is to be as holy as a human being can be. What does holiness look like as far as God goes? Look at the Son of God – Jesus Christ. Living a holy life is living a Christlike life.

Sometimes there is some confusion as to why, as Christians, we are to strive by His grace to live a holy life. Why does God want us to live a holy life? Why would He urge us here, and in many other places, to imitate His Son? What is the underlying motive that I am to have as a believer for holiness?

- 1) To honour the Son. Romans 8:29 makes this very clear.

“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”

Believers were predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son – that is, made like Christ. Then the reason is given – so that He, Jesus, might be the firstborn among many brethren. Jesus would be the oldest of the siblings. All of us would resemble and take after the firstborn. And as we all resemble the firstborn, what does it do? It honours Him. It glorifies Him. It shows His worthiness, His supremacy, His glory – as being the pattern we are to model.

2) To know the Son and rejoice in Him. Becoming like Christ does not only glorify God, it allows us to know Him. Christlikeness is the atmosphere in which the worship of God most effectively takes place. When you breathe the air of Christlikeness, you will be able to know God personally and intimately. There are two reasons for this:

i) God reveals Himself to the pure in heart. *“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. (Mat 5:8)* When you are clean, God reveals Himself to you. God does not pour out the reward of knowing Him to those who are in rebellion to Him. It is to those who are submitting to Him, and desiring Him, that He shows Himself to.

ii) When you are being sanctified you are beholding the divine nature from within:

“Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” (2Pe 1:4)

Becoming like Him is one of the greatest ways of knowing Him. When you are changed into His image, you know Him by experience. You have His mind, His attitude, His desires, His character. It is not simply appraising Him from the outside; it is to glory in Him from the inside.

You see Him in you, you see Him through you, and you see Him around you. – causing love for Him.

Now what happens when we know Christ and are living in a Christlike way? The short answer is: abundant life. Being like Christ is life more abundantly. It is fullness of joy. Both abundant life and fullness of joy is what Jesus promised if we build our life in Him. If our thinking, our actions, our attitudes, our words, our motives are rooted in Him. If we live for Him, and by Him and through Him and to Him – what kind of life will it be? Fullness! And notice how many times we have seen the word fullness used to describe being Christlike in the book of Ephesians (3:19, 4:13).

So the motive for Christlikeness is because it honours the Son, and it enables us to know Him and thereby love Him which will be fullness of joy and abundant life. The motives of honouring Christ and having life to its fullest are not two different motives, they are one. God’s desire is that we would both honour the Son and have fullness of joy in Him as He is revealed to us, and so model that before the world.

3) To draw others to Him

The world is to see the satisfaction that comes from Christlikeness. In that way, Christ is honoured. When the world sees the happiness of holiness, the fullness of

Christlikeness, they will begin to see that Christ is the centre - the supreme One to whom all must turn for life. The greatest testimony for evangelism is the fullness of life that you have found and are finding in Christ. So Christlikeness is both what will honour the Son, and bring us joy, and draw others to Him.

Paul having taught in verses 8 to 16 that the walk of unity and the walk of maturity go together, now homes in on the key ingredient of maturity – Christlikeness. He is now going to teach on the walk of holiness, the walk of Christlikeness.

How do we walk in holiness? How do we walk in Christlikeness?

The Reason for UnChristlikeness

He begins by defining it negatively. Don't walk, he says, like the other Gentiles – i.e., the unsaved. Don't let your manner of life, your everyday words, thoughts, deed, actions, attitudes, motives, goals, desires relationships be like that of the unsaved. What characterises the unsaved is not holiness or Christlikeness.

And now notice the reason they walk this way. Paul describes the unsaved in terms which suggest their manner of life reflects their thinking. Proverbs 23:7 says:

“As he thinketh in his heart, so is he”.

You are how you think. Your goals, desires, priorities, attitudes, ambitions, motivations, emotions, beliefs – all take place in the mind. And they shape your behaviour. Their thinking is described in three phrases:

i. **‘Vanity of their mind’** – the unsaved man's mind is vain, it is given to emptiness and futility. What they think about and focus on and live for is futile and empty. It has no lasting value, nothing that really matters.

ii. **The understanding is darkened**

Light always has the connotation of truth, openness, that which reveals, and that which is worthy to be revealed. Things which are shameful prefer the darkness. The understanding of unsaved man has crawled into a cave. In place of light and truth, there is falseness entering in – lies, deceits, things which are wrong.

iii. **Alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them** (John 1:4, I John 5:1)

These should be understood as one phrase. Unsaved man is estranged from the life of God, because of his ignorance of the way to God, and this ignorance is caused by blindness. The god of this world has blinded the eyes of those that do not believe.

Now notice something that these phrases have in common – the terrible condition of unsaved man is primarily described in terms that suggest he does not see something, he does not know something. He is described as blind, as ignorant, as darkened in the understanding, as having an empty mind. His sinful life is a reflection of this lack of knowledge. Unsaved man has so seared his conscience that he no longer feels the sinfulness of sin, and so yields himself increasingly to the things of sin.

Lasciviousness refers to insolence, rebellion, and immorality, and he works all moral impurity with greediness. He wants his sin in abundance.

But here is the idea – sinful man is doing what he knows. He is doing what his mind has taught him. He is behaving his beliefs. He is living out his vision of what life is about. He is acting in accord with his understanding. In other words – if unsaved man would see something, know something, he would change.

What do all these things suggest? If a man is behaving in an unChristlike way – he has not seen or heard Jesus Christ. They live in ignorance of His glory. They live in darkness to the glories of His light.

The Reason for Christlikeness

In contrast, Paul says to believers – *you have not so learned Christ*. This is a fascinating phrase, and it is the key to Christlikeness. Christlikeness is imitation of Christ. In order to imitate Him, you must learn and know Christ. The idea here is not to learn simply in a processing of facts way – but to appropriate Him by faith. Notice the very next verse – *if so be that you have heard Him, and been taught by Him*. The truth is Jesus stands in contrast to the phrase, ‘not so learned Christ’.

Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. We hear Christ Himself calling us to Himself through the Scriptures. As we respond, He increasingly shows us more of Himself by His Holy Spirit. So as believers, we learn Christ. We have our Lord in front of us.

Believers are those who have seen the glory of Christ. Not all of it. Some more than others – but they have seen Him. Having seen Him, they no longer have vain minds – chasing after futile things. They know Christ is the point of life. Their understanding is coming out into the light – it is seeing the priority of life – Christ. Above all, the blindness has been removed; they are no longer ignorant of Christ, and as such, no longer alienated from the life of God.

Be ye therefore followers [imitators] of God, as dear children; (Eph 5:1)
He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.
(1Jo 2:6)

So here is the main point – Christlikeness comes about because of clear and continual exposure to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Process of Christlikeness

Continual exposure to Christ **renews our mind**. That phrase is sandwiched between the ‘put off the old man and the put on the new man’, but it is the key to both of them. Learning Christ through the Word of God, through prayer, through this very process of sanctification, through service, and even through suffering – this is what renews our minds. God takes these photo-sensitive plates of our minds and begins to expose them to Christ. The greater the exposure, the more we’ll reflect Him. 2 Corinthians 3:18 is the classic passage here:

“But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” (2Co 3:18)

We’re changed, not because of a deep moral commitment, not because we’re more faithful than the next man – we become Christlike through beholding. Beholding means believing and believing means behaving.

And this renewing is into His image.

“Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.” (Col 3:9-10)

Romans 12:2 tells us we are transformed by the ‘renewing of our minds’. What is this renewing? It is when we see Christ and begin to delight in Him. We begin to love Him. This love is going to begin to renew our minds. We love what He loves and hate what He hates. Our desire for Christ will begin to flow over into a desire for more of Him. That will mean loving what He loves. He loves His name. He loves righteousness and justice. He loves His church. He loves the world. He hates sin. He hates unbelief. He hates pride. He hates distortions of His Word. He hates perversions of His gifts. As we increasingly are gazing at Jesus, loving what He loves, and hating what He hates, this is going to renew our minds radically. This re-orders our goals, priorities, plans, purposes, ambitions, attitudes, desires, emotions, beliefs. This renewing is a godly brainwashing. Our minds have to be reprogrammed, retrained to think and see God, self and the world from Christ’s perspective.

We are taking on a Christ-mindedness, a Christ-focus – or to put it another way – wisdom. We are growing in the fear of the Lord and wisdom.

You then **reject what is unChristlike**. We put off the conduct of the old man. We reject what is unChristlike. Since our minds are increasingly being rewired to live as Christ did, love what He loves, a way of life unlike Him must be rejected.

The old man is our old sinful nature that was crucified with Christ. But there are remnants of his ways still with us. He is dead, but his ways left a mark on our minds. We were trained by Him; our minds were programmed by him before we knew Christ. His ways, if yielded to, are becoming more corrupt, as they follow after deceitful lusts. That is why a believer can end up in sin that ought not to be named amongst saints, if he or she keeps yielding to the old man’s ways. Believers, who increasingly love Christ, must put off the old. Now, we are to reject the ways of the old man and his walk in our lives.

Remember Lazarus? He was dead, and was laid in the grave. Jesus arrived and commanded the stone to be rolled away. He then commanded, Lazarus to come forth. Lazarus was given new life. He was made a new man:

“And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave clothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go. (Joh 11:44)

Though he was a new man, he was still bound by the grave clothes. He was still wearing garments that belong on dead men. This is the call to a believer – put off the grave clothes! You are now a new person in Christ. Your old life was crucified with Christ. Colossians 3:3-4 says:

“For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.”

We don't have a life outside of Him anymore. He breathed His own life into us the day we were saved. We were created after the likeness of Him in holiness and righteousness as verse 24 says. Now, reject the grave clothes. Put off the old.

This is the negative aspect of becoming holy. It means saying no to things. It means removing certain things from our eyes and ears. It means avoiding certain situations. It means making no provision for the flesh. It means fleeing from temptation. It means not reading or watching or listening to things that belong to the old. It means refusing to indulge; refusing to give in to sin. It means confessing and forsaking sin as it is revealed to us. As Joseph fled, leaving his garment in Potiphar's wife's hands, so we must flee from sin, leaving the garment of the old man in the hands of the tempter – Satan.

Then every negative must be replaced with a positive. We are then to put on the new man. This new man is the new creation we are in Christ. In many ways – it is the life of Christ itself in us:

“He that hath the Son hath life...” “And this is life eternal...” “But put ye on the Lord Jesus”

. So we have put him on, and must 'out' him on. We must become what we are. So here we seek to **receive and reflect what is Christlike**. We receive Christlikeness by beholding it, and as our minds love it, seeking to flesh it out by the power of the Spirit. As we continually come to Jesus and embrace Him for all that we must be, the Spirit fills us and produces His fruit of Christlikeness in us.

Jesus illustrated it with the vine and the branches. So long as a branch keeps feeding on the vine, ever living on the vine, ever receiving life-giving sap from the vine, it will produce the fruit of the vine. If it cuts itself off from the vine, it will not bear fruit. The more you are coming to the Lord Jesus for all He is to be and all you must be, the more you are coming to Him to please Him and find pleasure in Him – the more you will reflect Him. In place of the old unChristlike ways, there will be Christlike ways of speaking, of thinking, of relating, of dealing with money, of working, of acting. As Paul put it in Galatians 4:19, Christ is increasingly formed in us. We put on the Lord Jesus.

Those who live in immoral, sinful ways are pursuing life. They are pursuing life outside of Christ, because they are blind to Him, ignorant of His satisfying glory, and

therefore darkened and vain in their minds. Those who come to salvation see Christ, and so have every reason to put off the old, and put on the new – the garment of Christlikeness.

Sadly, not every Christian lives this way. And the reason is because they do not see the glories of chapters 1 to 3. They do not see the satisfying nature of God, so they cannot connect the behaviour back to a belief. They see the instructions, but not the fullness of life. They see the commands, but not the fullness of joy in Christ. So they seek life outside of Christlikeness. They retain the old man's ways, and often sink into the soul-destroying ways of sin.

Holiness is happiness. You never so enter into your created purposes as when you are saved, and continually grow into the image of Christ. You are becoming more of who you were meant to be – life is really beginning.

So the call is – behold your God (Isaiah 40:9) The call is “*Acquaint thyself with Him*” The call is – learn Christ. Make Him your Bread to live on, your Water to drink, your Truth, your Way, your Life. He is that. Learn of Him, and so reflect Him.
