

## Habits of Holiness: Part 2

When God sought an illustration to sum up a Christian's relationship with Himself, He most frequently used the metaphor of walking. All of us can either experience or see walking, and understand what it is.

Two people walking together have a relationship. Two strangers will never walk side by side at the same speed for any length of time. Only those with a relationship walk with each other. People walking together communicate. People walking together are in agreement – about where they are going, about the speed at which they will walk. Many simple truths come from thinking about the illustration of walking.

The most obvious is that walking is the repetition of similar steps. Walking is made up of repeating the motion of taking a step over and over, till the repetition makes up a walk. Last week, we began studying Scripture on what it means to walk with God. We saw that there are certain fundamental acts of obedience that must become habits to a Christian.

Habits are formed by repeating a certain act over and over. Our character is the sum total of all our habits. Therefore, Christian character is really made up of many interconnected habits of Christlikeness. Repeating these steps over and over will constitute a walk with God. In part 1 of this series, we saw the starting point is a walk of humility. Since the Christian life is all God's grace, the basis for it is to get into a place to receive grace – and that is humility.

We saw why humility is the same thing as walking by faith – the very lifeblood of the Christian life. In fact, humility is the same as the fear of the Lord: a combined attitude of submission, awe, dependence, quietness of spirit, and lowness before the supremacy of God. We saw humility is expressed and grown through prayer, serving others, and using all of life as an opportunity to allow His strength to be made perfect in our weakness.

In Part 2, we move on to a second step you need to keep walking with God. This habit flows out of the last one: if you are humble – as expressed by prayer, service and a desire to depend on God – this step will follow naturally. We find it in **Galatians 5**:

*This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.*

**Galatians 5:16-17**

So the second step we should have is walking in the Spirit. **Ephesians 5:18** calls it being filled with the Spirit, and it refers to the habit of coming under the Holy Spirit's control. See, if you're practicing humility by actively seeking God as your all in all, and depending on Him totally, then this step will be a reaction to that attitude. Walking in the Spirit is having a heart that submits to God's control, surrendering to Him, and asking Him to fully control and empower you.

There is much confusing and false teaching today about being filled with the Spirit. The Greek verb tense is present continuous, meaning it has nothing to do with the baptism of the Spirit. Rather, God is commanding us to continually be coming under the control of the Holy Spirit. To be filled with Him does not mean you get more of Him. Rather, it's where there is less of you in control, and therefore, He has more of you.

We use a similar idea when we say someone is filled with sorrow or filled with anger. It means sorrow or anger is the thing controlling them. Paul even compares it to being drunk with wine. See, when someone takes in too much alcohol, they get drunk, and then we describe them as 'under the influence.' They are controlled and changed by the influence of alcohol. Similarly, walking in the Spirit is a heart that wants God to be in control and submits to Him.

Such a heart willingly, purposefully, submits to God, surrendering all to Him, and asking Him to control, guide, lead and empower every action. It comes under His influence, until there is supernatural change in character. It's a state of being humbly submitted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ; it's the God-dependent relationship of relying on Him. Remember the attitude of **Acts 17:28**: *"For in Him we live, and move, and have our being."*

Walking in the Spirit is a habit that needs to be learnt. So how do I learn and strengthen this habit of being controlled by the Spirit?

### **1. Confess sin quickly**

Paul uses the Greek tense that means: *"be ye continually getting filled."* This means the process can be stopped and must be started again. What halts walking in the Spirit? Galatians tells us – when we walk in the flesh. That is, when we sin, when we choose self over God, when we decide to please ourselves first. It is when pride rules – directing life for its own glory.

As we sin, we quench and grieve the Holy Spirit. So one of the habits we need to learn is confession of sin, when it happens. As soon as we are convicted of the fact that we are not walking under the Lordship of Jesus, we need to confess our sins and ask that the Holy Spirit again be in full control.

### **2. Saturate yourself in Scripture**

The Spirit works in conjunction with the Word. He does not lead apart from it, or in contradiction of it. He wrote the Word; He illuminates understanding of the Word; and He will always use the Word as His means of guiding us. Therefore, the degree to which we know and understand the Word is the degree to which we can be controlled by the Spirit.

**Colossians 3:16** says, *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom."* Comparing Scripture with Scripture shows this verse is a parallel of **Ephesians 5:18**, which says we are to be filled with the Spirit. The conclusion is: if you are Word-filled, you can be Spirit-filled. The proportion with which you take in the Word is the proportion in which you can walk in the Spirit.

Think of it as the leash. Ever see the leash that blind people use on their seeing-eye dogs? It's not a long leash, is it? It is a short, tight, even solid leash or handle. This is so the dog's every move can be immediately sensed and followed by the blind person. Well, the leash for us is the Word of God. If you want to be walking in the Spirit, you need to make the leash of the Word tight – by saturating your mind with Scripture.

The Holy Spirit needs a short leash between your heart and His – and the more Scripture you know, the tighter that leash. For that reason, the word of Christ must dwell richly in us. We must be saturated with it. So one of the daily habits we need is an intake of the Word. There needs to be a time where you take in the Word and ask the Lord to illuminate your heart so you can see His glory in the Word, and make the necessary changes in your life to reflect that.

For this reason, try make these four actions around the Word a habit:

- **Study the Word.** Take time each day to pour over one section and glean all you can out of it.
- **Memorise the Word.** Take time to memorise at least one verse, or re-memorise old ones.
- **Meditate on the Word.** Think about that Scripture at times during the day, and allow it to saturate into every part of your life.
- **Read the Word.** Read through the Bible in larger portions, so that you can always be balanced in your approach to life, and know the whole counsel of God. This may sound like it takes hours, but in fact, very fruitful, useful time with God could occur each day in less than an hour if you read and study carefully and prayerfully.

The habit of walking in the Spirit will be only as successful as your habitual intake of the Word. You need to take it in in large amounts. That's why you also need to be in your local church every time the Word is preached there. The more Word we take in, the better. Obviously, we must listen with a view to obeying, but if we are seeking to walk with God, then that is a given.

Romans 8 shows us the one walking after the Spirit is the one whose mind is different – someone who minds the things of the Spirit. Where does their mind get this food for thought? The Word of God. The goal is **Philippians 3:10** – to know Him. See, we must read Scripture to grow acquainted with a Person. The idea is not to add rules, or get good ideas from the Bible – rather, it is to see the character of God, and seek to imitate that by the power of the Spirit.

We want to grow in a relationship – learning about the Person of our God and His relationship to us. It is as we behold God in His Word that we will walk away changed. Many a person has daily devotions, yet never grows. The reason is they do not seek that the Holy Spirit illuminate their reading, so that they might behold a Person in those Pages. They do not seek to grow in their relationship with God.

Such people glean only some ideas that require no illumination to see, and so they never behold the glory of God in His Word. Illumination is where the Holy Spirit turns on the light, where we see what we did not see before – where God's character and wisdom become abundantly clear to us as we study His Word.

Before we read. We should each have the attitude of Samuel, who said, *“Speak Lord, for thy servant heareth”* (**1 Samuel 3:10**). Indeed, we should have the attitude of the Greeks who said to Philip, *“Sir, we would see Jesus”* (**John 12:21**). We would see Jesus as we read – and the cry is not to digest a chapter a day of Bible – but to so read, depending on the Holy Spirit, as to truly grow in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle John put it this way:

*He that saith, ‘I know Him,’ and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth His word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in Him. He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked.*

**1 John 2:4-6**

Put simply, the Christian life is a walk of imitation. We are seeking to act like the Son of God. He has set the pace, He has showed us how it’s done, He has authored the race, and now simply expects us to follow. We are to react like He did, speak like he did, pray like He did, love like He did.

**Romans 8:29** tells us that God’s purpose for a believer is that we be conformed to the image of His Son. Therefore, walking with God fulfils our design instructions. We are to be individualised expressions of Christ. That is what the verse says – so that Christ might be the firstborn among many brethren. In other words, Jesus would be the epitome, and there would be millions with a family resemblance to the eldest, glorifying God the Son, and God the Father.

Again, to be able to imitate, you must be watching closely the one you seek to mimic. This can only happen with much exposure to the Word of God. So when it comes to the Word – there must first be saturation, followed by meditation, followed by imitation. And that leads us into our next point.

### **3. Seek to be a doer of the Word**

This is a heart that relishes application. It listens with a view to obeying. It does not cherish knowledge as an end in itself. A teachable person is not one who simply likes knowledge. A teachable person is one who likes change. For them, knowledge is simply a means to an end to be changed into the image of Christ.

If I am humble, then I already have the attitude of submitting to God – I want to serve Him. To take a step of walking in the Spirit means saturating myself with His Word and seeking to follow Him exactly as He tugs on the leash of my renewed mind. One walking in the Spirit has the sensitive relationship of a believer listening to God leading them through the implanted Word in their mind.

Indeed, **Galatians 5:25** says: *“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”* Here, Paul uses a different Greek word for walk from what he uses a few verses earlier. This word means to keep in step with the Spirit. Simply put – consistently obey the leadership of the Holy Spirit. When He tells you to stop – stop. When He says go – go. Keep in step.

You get out of step by living life selfishly and seeking your own desires above that of pleasing God. That is why the preceding verse says: *“And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts”* (**Galatians 5:24**). Believers have died with Christ, and continually act that out by living for one other, rather than themselves. This is true obedience – following the will of another.

A doer of the Word is not simply a religious man acting out a code. No, it is a sheep following a Shepherd, a servant following a Master, a child following the Father. We walk in the Spirit by sensitively obeying the prompts of the Holy Spirit. These prompts are not mystical words or revelations that are extra-biblical. They are not supposed feelings or emotions. They are the Holy Spirit using the Word of God – which we have digested through reading and meditating – prompting us to be doers of what we have heard. This we then do, by depending on Him.

Did you ever think that a walk is really a process of nearly falling? You lift up a leg, and were you not to put down another, the forward motion would send you to the ground. You keep placing down a leg as your only means of support. That is how we obey. We obey, depending on the Holy Spirit as our only means of support – He is the only way we can obey. We will fall, without Him empowering our walk.

#### **4. Give thanks for all things**

A fourth means of entrenching the habit of walking in the Spirit is to seek to give thanks for all things. Paul says in **Ephesians 5:20**: *“...giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Now this is an effect of being filled or controlled, but it often reveals when we are not. An unthankful spirit is evidence of one not being controlled by the Spirit. So by seeking to be thankful continually, we will, in turn, seek the filling of the Spirit to be able to do this.

Making gratitude a habit will make walking in the Spirit a habit. Gratitude is evidence of submission – it shows you truly see yourself as a servant, deserving nothing, but being gifted with many things from your Father. Gratitude is an attitude. We must learn the habit of continual thankfulness. Continual thankfulness works hand in hand with being continually humble, and continually walking in the Spirit.

#### **5. Sing praise to God**

In the same passage, we find another effect of being controlled by the Spirit which we should seek: *“Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord”* (**Ephesians 5:19**). This singing has nothing to do with your ability to sing on key, it has nothing to do with your love for music. It is the reaction of a heart filled to overflowing with the knowledge of God.

A happy heart sings. It’s as natural as the grumbling of a miserable heart. Thankfulness and singing are like twin forces that are evidence of being controlled by the Spirit. Their absence is

the alarm bell that we are probably walking in the flesh. The kind of songs we are to sing are psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. These terms reflect songs with a strong Scriptural basis.

We should major on songs that are strongly Biblical, filled with Scripture or Scriptural truth, which point us directly to the Saviour. Some of the trite, superficial and frankly unbiblical modern-day choruses do nothing to further our walk with God. Martin Luther regarded his hymnbook as his most important book, after the Bible.

Do you make a habit of singing when taking a walk, or when doing household chores, when driving? Once again, it is impossible to do this apart from being in submission to the Spirit of God. So the logic is – if you make a habit out of walking in the Spirit, you will be reminded that you ought to be praising God in song. When you are not, and it drives you back to God to be controlled by Him again.

## **6. Cheerfully submit to earthly authorities**

Submission is an unnatural response to one walking in the flesh. When living to please ourselves, we submit to no one. We please ourselves first. Submission to another only comes as a fruit of the Spirit. The following verses in Ephesians speak of the submission of wives, children, and employees to authority. It also speaks of the godly, sacrificial love that those over them are to exhibit. The key again is to make cheerful submission a habit.

A habit of cheerfully submitting to earthly authority requires continual submission to God in Christ through the Holy Spirit. I can only submit to the authorities God has placed in my life if I am submitting to God's authority in the first place. This submission is not a begrudging, drag-my-feet kind of deferring, it is a heart that rejoices to obey God, and therefore can obey others, as they represent God's authority. When they do not do so, we can continue to submit to God, in spite of their rebellion.

So, just like thankfulness and singing, the absence of cheerful submission should be the thing that alerts me to the fact that I am probably walking in the flesh, after my own desires, in my own power. It is a cause and effect thing – walking in the Spirit causes these reactions, yet their absence should warn us that we need to confess some sin and be controlled by the Spirit again.

See, just like humility is the bedrock of relating to God, so having the Holy Spirit controlling you is fundamental to everything else. He empowers reading the Word, praying, witnessing, Christlike character – indeed, everything in the Christian life. So the first kind of walk is the worthy walk of humility that wants God to be in control. It is dependent, submissive, still, small, and in awe of God.

That naturally leads into the walk in the Spirit – desiring Him to fill and control us fully, as we submit to the Lordship of Christ. The ways of strengthening the walk of humility are prayer, service to others, and seeing life's negatives as a means of humbling us. The ways of strengthening our walk in the Spirit are to confess our sins, be saturated with the Word, seek to obey it, give thanks, sing praise, and submit cheerfully to earthly authority.

So, walking with God is indeed simple. Much like physical walking, it becomes very natural, once our bodies, and in this case, our souls, memorise the various movements in walking. We've seen walking humbly, and walking in the Spirit. The Bible still has a few more steps we need to memorise if we are to be truly walking with God. In Part 3 of this series, we will explore how to grow in habits of holiness.