

### Habits of Holiness: Part 3

Walking with God is a commonly used phrase. But it's sad how few understand what God means when He uses His favourite illustration – walking. Some speak of walking with God like it is a general sense of being saved, as if once having come to Christ constitutes walking with God. As we've been seeing in the series, walking with God is much more than that.

Walking is the repetition of similar steps. When someone repeats the movement of their two legs in a similar motion, they begin to walk. The Christian life is really the repetition of similar acts of obedience, that makes up a walk with God. God delights to use the illustration of walking because it is so simple: it suggests the repetition of similar, simple acts.

If you walk with someone, you are obviously familiar with them, but it suggests more than simple acquaintance. It suggests communication, fellowship, agreement, a similar destination. When God speaks of walking with Him, He means the entire Christian life of relating to God. In Parts 1 and 2 of this series, we've explored two of the strides that make up our walk with God.

The foundational stride is humility – a walk of fearing the Lord through submission, dependence, awe and smallness, as described in **Ephesians 4:1-2**: *"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love."*

This kind of walk responds to how great God is, and seeks to allow Him to be first in our lives. It wants God to be all in all. We saw some habits of holiness that entrench humility in our lives: a daily time of secret prayer, continually praying throughout the day, seeking to serve others, and regarding the negatives in life as opportunities to allow God's strength to be perfected in us.

In Part 2, we saw the stride of walking in the Spirit. This means to come under the Lordship of Christ, to totally depend on His Spirit to empower us. This occurs in that state of humility, when we ask Him to control us, and surrender. It means confessing our sins when we fall. Since the Spirit leads through His Word, it means we must be saturated with it, meditate on it, and then imitate Christ. We must doers, not only hearers.

Then, habits which flow out of walking in the Spirit are thankfulness, praising God in song, and submitting cheerfully to each other. The absence of these things and of the fruits of Christlike character, indicate we are not submitted to the Spirit of God at that point.

Well, the Bible is certainly not finished when it comes to our walk with God. Just as the simplicity of walking is actually made up of quite few coordinated movements of the upper and lower legs, so walking with God is the repetition of several habits of holiness. The next kind of stride we should be taking is a walk of holiness – as found in **Ephesians 4:17**:

*This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind."*

**Ephesians 4:17**

## **A walk of holiness**

Paul states a walk of holiness in the negative: do not walk as the unsaved do. Well, how do they walk? He tells us in verse 19: *"who, being past feeling, have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness."* The unsaved are slaves to themselves; they follow no other law except the law of sin within their bodies.

Therefore, the Christian's walk is to be one of increasing sinlessness. No, we may not ever be completely sinless this side of Heaven, but we must seek to sin less, and obey more. This is Paul's description of a walk of holiness in the following verses:

*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.*

**Ephesians 4:22-24**

The stride we should be taking each day is one of putting off certain sins, having our minds changed, and practicing obedience instead. In **Romans 6:4**, Paul describes this habit of holiness as a *"walk in newness of life."* We have died with Christ, so we can continually die to sin. We have been raised with Him, so we can continually be alive to righteousness and obeying God.

See, holiness is essentially the character of God, in its essence. The word in the Hebrew carries the idea of being separate. You could think of holiness as 'otherness.' It is being unlike the world, sin, and the compromise around us. It is pure, noble, majestic, spotless. It is everything right, good, just, lovely, praiseworthy. But it is profoundly other – different from the world.

This is why Paul defines the walk in a negative way – to emphasise that a walk of holiness is a different way of living. It is not a bit of the world with a Christian flavour. It is not the world's music, the world's entertainment, the world's dress, the world's morals, the world's ethics, the world's relationships painted over with a thin veneer of Jesus paint. No, it is profoundly different, from the inside out. Holiness is the character of Christ reflected in a human by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Every day, we ought to be growing in this walk of holiness. What are some habits of holiness that entrench this walk of holiness?

### **1. Set times of self-examination**

You can never bring in the new if you cannot identify the old. We need to have times of self-examination, where we look into the mirror of the Word, and ask the Holy Spirit to show us our sin. How can you clean a house, if you do not know where and what to wash? You need to

identify the self-pleasing thoughts, attitudes, ways, actions, behaviour that offends God and does not imitate Christ.

The standard is not what you or I think is right or wrong – the standard is the holiness of God, as revealed in the Word. Many Christians never grow because they hate the pain of self-examination. Who likes to sit in front of a superior and hear a list of where we have failed? But that is the humble heart that God delights in – it is the heart that wants to change. David exemplified this when he said:

*Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

**Psalm 139:23-24**

The heart that truly is willing to wait before God to allow Him to show us our failures will be rewarded. Jesus said, *“Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled”* (**Matthew 5:6**). The one who truly wants God’s righteousness begins by humbly seeking to know where they fall short of God’s righteousness. This requires the habit of being still before God, and allowing Him to show us these things.

The conviction of God is sometimes a loud, painful piercing. At other times, it is a soft but audible prodding. Either way, we must never be so hardened as to end up with a seared conscience, where we cannot see our own sin, and therefore no longer grow.

## **2. Learn to repent and confess sins when they are revealed**

Immediate confession to God is a good habit. How often we know we have sinned, but push down the convicting of the Spirit till later, by which time we have a huge shopping list of sins to confess to Him. Since God’s cleansing is continual and immediate, we must confess our sins as they occur. That does not mean we must become nonchalant and flippant about sin – this is why I say, confess and repent. We must seek to turn our back on sin when it happens.

**Proverbs 28:13 says**, *“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.”* Never sin on credit, thinking that God will forgive you – that is high-handed presumption. It is tantamount to trampling underfoot the blood of Christ, and counting it a light thing to have been redeemed by the blood of the Son of God. Repent, and mean it.

## **3. Put off sin**

A third means of growing in holiness is to put sin to death. The fundamental power we have to do this rests in the fact that we were crucified with Christ. Listen to Paul’s reasoning in **Romans 6:10-11**: *“For in that He died, He died unto sin once: but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God. Likewise, reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

The power of Calvary over sin is given to us in our position as part of Christ. The Holy Spirit gives us the power to mortify, to put sin to death, according to **Romans 8:13**. So how do we put sin to death? Two ways: we refuse it, and we starve it.

First – refuse it. A desire that is indulged grows in strength. A desire that is refused shrivels and weakens. The first way of dying to sin is to say no to it, to flee sin, to flee temptation. **1 Peter 2:11** says, *“Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.”* Jesus called this denying yourself. It is to refuse sin when you are tempted, to say no to it in the power of the Spirit.

The second means of killing sin is to starve it. Anything you do not feed will eventually die. We are to starve sin in our lives by refusing to feed it what it wants through our senses. Refuse to give sin any food in the form of ungodly television, online content or social media, games, conversations with others, even leisure activities. Don't give sin anything to feed on. Paul says in **Romans 13:14**, *“But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.”*

Don't give sin a chance by feeding it the things that will tempt you later, or by feeding it opportunities to sin. We are commanded to avoid all appearance of evil in **1 Thessalonians 5:22**. In certain situations, we ought to completely separate from those who the Bible tells us to, and to avoid going to places or situations which will tempt us. Separation from sin is a means of putting it to death in our lives.

**Psalms 1:1** speaks not negatively, but positively about doing this: *‘Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.’* If we continually make a habit of denying our flesh the sin, and by denying it the things that make it tempting, we are in the process of mortifying, or putting off the old.

#### **4. Have your mind renewed by the Word of God**

The fourth means of growing in holiness is seen in verse 23: *“And be renewed in the spirit of your mind.”* It is critical that we see our sin, and the righteous alternative, as God sees it. This is where the Bible study we spoke of in Part 2 of this series comes into play. We must see God's character in the Word, and see what He thinks of this sin. We must submit our thinking on the issue to what He says, and allow Him to mould our thoughts.

We always act out our beliefs. So you need more than just self-denial to conquer sin. Your belief system must be changed by the power of the Spirit, in conjunction with the Word. It is only as you believe differently about a sin, that you will stop doing it. It is only as you truly believe in the reward of righteousness, that you pursue it. So saturation and meditation of the Bible is what will bring about this renewing of the mind.

#### **5. Put on righteousness**

Fifth, Paul says in **Ephesians 4:24**, *“And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”* If we put off sin, we must put on righteousness. Nature abhors

a vacuum. You cannot only subtract something from your behaviour or thinking. There must be something to replace it, and in fact, there always will be.

That is why, if you do not replace what you put off with righteous thinking and acting, you will more than likely replace it with that old sin, or even worse forms of sin. If you are going to starve the flesh, you had better feed the Spirit. Your heart naturally leans towards meaning, joy and happiness. You cannot merely deny it something, without giving it something better, or it will eventually rebel and binge on the very sin you are seeking to starve.

So we are to make a habit of obedient behaviour. Paul uses examples in Ephesians: instead of lying, we should speak truth; instead of stealing, do honest labour and give to others; instead of corrupt communication, have edifying communication. The Bible is filled with positive commands – the things we are to be doing. We must not just flee sin; we must follow after righteousness.

These habits of self-examination, confession and repentance, mortification of sin, renewing of the mind and reflecting our Lord in obedience, will cause us to grow in holiness. The stride of holiness – of being like God and unlike sin, will become the rule and not the exception.

So, thus far, the movements of our spiritual limbs are to be a worthy walk of humility, a walk in the Spirit, and a walk of holiness. The next kind of walk we find a little further down in **Ephesians 5:2** is this: *“And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour.”*

## **A walk of love**

The next walk we are to have is a walk of love. Love is to characterise our lives. We hardly need remind ourselves of the priority of love. Jesus said that the greatest commandment of all is to love the Lord with all our heart, soul and mind (**Matthew 22:37**). Paul said in **Romans 13:9** that the whole law can be summed up in the phrase – love your neighbour as yourself.

Clearly, to love God and our neighbour simplifies our walk. But what does it mean to love? Like faith, love is more often described than defined. **1 Corinthians 13** is a description of what love does, not what it is. That's fine, because we need to know what to do – be practical with our love. But perhaps love can be defined this way: sacrificial desire for another.

Now that might sound almost like an oxymoron – sacrificial desire. If you sacrifice, you are totally self-denying, but if you desire, you want it for yourself. But in truth, that is really love. True love is not selfish. It truly sacrifices for the good of another. But to say that love does not seek the joy and happiness of love itself is to tear the very heart out of the glory of love. Love enjoys the one it loves, or else the one it loves is not glorified.

If a man says, 'I love my wife, regardless of how I feel,' it might sound noble, but it does not glorify her. If he says, 'I love my wife, and she makes me the happiest man in the world,' he glorifies her. To say, 'Oh, he is selfish because he wants her to make him happy' is ridiculous.

Love desires. It takes joy in another. The joy of another is what pleases it. This is love. It sacrifices for the good of another, which brings it joy – it is love's desire to please another.

That's why I define love as sacrificial desire. The Christian's life is to be one of sacrificial desire towards God and others. It seeks to please God more than self, which brings it pleasure. That is the paradox of love. It seeks the good of others at its own expense, which brings it joy. So what are some means of increasing in the habit of loving God and others?

### **1. When loving God, the first habit is continual surrender**

Now we've dealt with this somewhat in our look at walking in the Spirit, but see Paul's description of how love grows in our lives:

*That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love...*

**Ephesians 3:16-17**

There's a progression in this prayer of Paul's for spiritual growth. We are firstly to be strengthened in the inner man by the Spirit – that's walking in the Spirit. Walking in the Spirit will lead to the second thing Paul says – Christ will dwell in your hearts by faith. Now wait, doesn't He already dwell there, if I am saved? He does, but the Greek word for dwell here literally means to 'house-down' – that is – to be settled.

In other words, Christ is to be at home in our lives. He is not to be a guest now and then, an honoured visitor. He is to be the Master who owns and arranges every room of our lives as He pleases. It is as we practice giving over to Him the control of every aspect of our lives, that the next stage happens – *"that ye being rooted and grounded in love."*

See, our lives will be characterised by love for God and others when Christ is increasingly the Master of every area of our lives. Why? What's the connection? Well, sacrificial surrender to Him is love. It is not love when you grant thing to Christ that costs you nothing. It is not love when you do things for God with a selfish hidden agenda. It is when you are willing to give what is precious to you, in obedience, that you grow in love for Him.

When Abraham submitted to the command to sacrifice his precious Isaac, when the whole experience was over, do you think he had less or more love for God? Obviously, sacrificial surrender is the heart of sacrificial desire. Loving God starts with surrender – with faith-filled obedience. Because it is only as you obey, that He reveals Himself to you in greater amounts, and He becomes so much clearer, and therefore so much easier to love.

Love begins with sacrificial surrender. This is why Christians ought to practice sacrificial giving. Financially, sacrificially giving to God has almost nothing to do with funding the kingdom as the prosperity teachers will tell you, and everything to do with freeing your heart from dependence on money. It is an act of faith where you state your ultimate confidence is God, not your job or your bank balance. This act of sacrifice grows our love.

But sacrificial giving is not restricted to money. Paul says the Macedonians first gave themselves to the Lord. Sacrificially giving your time to God, your talents and abilities, your resources in service for God grows your love for Him. Most often this will be expressed in love for other believers, because other believers are the tangible, practical way of expressing love for God, outside of personal worship.

So, a sacrificial surrender of all I own – my time, my possessions, my family, my children, my spouse, my health, my reputation, my comforts, my future, my ambitions and goals, my plans, my very desires – will root and ground us in love for God.

## **2. A second habit for growing in love is to rejoice in God**

Rejoicing is a command – **Philippians 4:4** says, *“Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, rejoice.”* We are to make enjoying God the heart of our love for Him. Desiring God, pursuing the pure pleasure of God, gives us so much of the impetus of love. Love is not regarding God with admiration from a distance. It is pursuing Him as the One who will satisfy our hearts like none other.

We have spoken about the fear of the Lord as the foundation of humility, and that is crucial. Part of fearing God, though, is the attraction – the desire, the love for God. The fear of God really has a push and a pull – the majesty and holiness of God which causes us to fall down in awe and even flee, and the goodness of God which draws us like a magnet. We must be desirous of finding great pleasure and joy in God, and so keep our hearts burning for Him.

## **3. Thirdly, we need to externalise our love in practical ways**

*But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.*

**1 John 3:17-18**

We must make the habit of expressing our love in deed, not in sentiment. Our love must reach beyond kind thoughts, words and emotions, and reach into other people's lives. If another person cannot measure the effect of your love for them in their lives, your love is probably theoretical.

So the Christian walking with God is walking in holiness and walking in love. Their habits of holiness will include self-examination, confession and repentance, putting off sin, being renewed in their minds, putting on righteousness, sacrificially surrendering and giving, rejoicing in God, and externalising their love practically.

In the last part of this series, we will look at the final two walks of a believer.