

## Habits of Holiness: Part 4

Have you ever watched someone perform an amazing feat of coordination, balance or physical agility, and just marvelled, wondering how they do it, and then do it before a crowd? Ask them how, and one word will pop up – practice. Physical performers learn their particular movement by repeating it over and over, until their body has memorised the movement. It becomes second-nature – but only by continuous, frequent repetition.

Spiritually, the same is true. A stable, mature Christian life comes about as a result of the frequent repetition of certain acts of obedience. We've been calling them habits of holiness in this series. We've seen that walking with God, like walking in the physical realm, is really the repetition of steps – a continual, frequent practice of certain things, which become a consistent walk with God.

Just like those performers whose amazing feats cause us to marvel, mature Christians who you admire are probably simply people who have made obedience a habit in their life. They have made obeying God in certain areas something their souls have memorised, till it was second nature to them.

We've seen some wonderful things from Ephesians about walking with God. We saw first that we should be walking in humility. We then looked at walking in the Spirit. In Part 3 of this series, we explored walking in holiness and walking in love. For each one, we've seen there are certain habits to be formed – to get us into stride, so to speak.

These habits include prayer, service to others, submission to Christ, confession of sin when we fall, saturation with the Word, a desire to obey, thanksgiving and singing, cheerful submission, putting off the old, being renewed in our minds, putting on the new, surrender of all to God, serving others, being practical with our love, and rejoicing in God.

Just like our bodies perform the various movements of walking simultaneously, so these habits are to be continually done, not waiting for a stage-by-stage effect. We are always to be trying to do all of them, when appropriate, and so be walking with God. In last part of this series, let's look at final two kinds of walks from Ephesians: *"For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light"* (**Ephesians 5:8**).

Walk as children of light, or, as John puts it in **1 John 1:7**, *"walk in the light."* But what does that mean? Paul tells us using the illustration of light and darkness: *"But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light"* (**Ephesians 5:13**). Light reveals what is. Put simply, light shows what is hidden, what is actually there.

In the spiritual realm, that would mean a walk in the light exposes darkness with its light; it shows those in darkness what they really are. This reminds us of John's description of Christ:

*And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light,*

*neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.*

**John 3:19-20**

Someone whose garments are blotted with sin spots will not approach the light that will highlight their sin; they will avoid it, so the darkness will conceal their filthy condition. Light reveals. It shows what is. It also gives guidance. With light, people can see their way. For this reason, Jesus likens His believers to lights set on a hill – they are not meant to be hidden, but to be clearly seen.

Now, what does it mean to walk in the light? It means to live and speak in such a way as to be a light to those in darkness. Lights are not meant to be hidden, nor are they meant to be covered. A Christian is not to hide their identity as a believer, nor are they to live a life so full of double standards that they are no light at all. They are to be clear in their walk and talk. There are two areas that will make a person clearly different – their consecration, and their communication.

## **Walk in the light through consecration**

Consecration means to dedicate something totally for someone else – in this case, God. A consecrated life is one totally given over in service to God. What are some habits of holiness that will cause me to grow in my consecration?

### **1. Consecrate your everyday tasks**

Practise the habit of doing everything for the Lord. Paul tells us that even the mundane things of eating and drinking can be done to glorify God: *“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). Colossians 3:17* carries this idea as well: *“And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him.”*

What could be a greater difference to people around us than to see us managing to do everything with joy, as unto God? And read Paul’s instruction to workers in **Colossians 3:22-23**: *“Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.”*

Consecrating everything we do in life is the most obvious way of setting ourselves apart for Him. Yes, it takes some mental discipline, but habits are formed by repetition. Practice doing even the mundane things like washing and eating to please and honour God.

### **2. Consecrate your body to God with discipline and honour**

**Romans 12:1** tells us, *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”* Our

bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. That is an awesome thought. It means God meets with you here on earth – in your body.

With such a thought, we must be presenting our bodies to God as a living sacrifice – to be used by Him. But we do not give what is defiled and dirty to Him, we give what is pure and consecrated. For that reason, we must make sure we practice physical discipline with our bodies – and make a habit of it.

Paul says in **1 Corinthians 9:27**: *“But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.”* Paul did not let his body rule his spirit; rather, his spirit ruled his body. **Proverbs 25:28** tells us a man without self-control is like a defenceless city. So we need to bring our bodies into subjection. Consider some areas where your body must obey God:

- **Sleep** – Your body is not to have more than your lot of it. For that matter, **Psalm 127** tells us not to give it less either.
- **Food** – We are not to be gluttonous or self-indulgent. We are not to eat unhealthy foods, or eat excessively. We must also not undereat for the sake of appearance.
- **Exercise** – We ought to train our bodies with some sort of physical activity to keep it strong enough to handle the strains of life.
- **Sexuality** – We must not practice any form of sexuality except that which is permitted – between husband and wife.
- **Substances** – We must not take harmful substances into our bodies that could destroy them or cause enslaving addictions.

These things we need to make habits of, so that our bodies are pure, healthy instruments for the Master’s use.

### **3. Consecrate your thoughts to God**

**Romans 12:2** takes up the thought about consecrating the body and moves it to the mind. It says: *“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”* Our minds must belong to God. **Proverbs 23:7** sums it up: *“For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.”* You are what you think, says the Bible. For that reason, we must grab our thoughts and make them obedient to God.

Paul uses militaristic language when talking about what to do with our thoughts in **2 Corinthians 10:5**: *“Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”* Every thought is to be captured – like a prisoner of war – and brought before the throne of Christ. If it is not obedient to Him, it should be cast out of our minds immediately.

**Philippians 4:8** gives us the standard for the kind of thoughts we ought to be thinking: *“Finally brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever s*

*lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things."*

#### **4. Consecrate your finances to God**

Walking in the light suggests openness and transparency. Paul says it is a shame to even speak of the things that the wicked do in secret. He says covetous men will not inherit the kingdom of God. Christians are to be free from covetousness, greed, and a love of money. Rather, we are to be those who use money effectively, knowing it is simply part of life – neutral in itself.

We should avoid a foolish "give-to-get" theology, treating God like a lottery ticket, and instead be good stewards of our wealth. The unsaved should see that we conduct our finances with openness, transparency and freedom from the bondage they are in, which exposes the darkness they are in.

We should practice sacrificial giving and generosity, but also be free from materialism. Take care not to chase rainbows in the form of appearances and needless luxuries, or desire and accumulate things that are extravagant, and not sensible. A consecrated bank account will keep perspective on what really counts, and free us from the rat race which those in darkness are forever in. That is our consecration.

#### **Walk in the light through communication**

The second area we said that will be light to the darkness is our communication. Our speech must be markedly different from the world's to be children of light. Some habits to be formed should be:

##### **1. Share the Gospel with others**

This is obviously what light does – it shows the ultimate truth. But here is where our consecration comes in – it is hard to tell others about light when your life is darkness. A consecrated life gives authority to preach the Gospel.

##### **2. Call sin what it is**

While we may not be preaching the Gospel every day, we need to take a stand against sin. That may mean refusing to listen to office gossip, rebuking someone for a filthy joke, showing your displeasure over dishonesty, refusing to join in with others in their sin. Call sin what it is – sin, and separate from it. This will obviously involve some speaking on your part, and Christians need, with meekness, to rebuke and expose sin.

##### **3. Practice speech that is pure, clear, purposeful and timely**

Our words ought to be truthful and life-giving. We've looked at biblical communication in other series, so we know that, by obeying the Bible's commands with our speech, our communication should be noticeably different from the world's. It must not be marked with exaggeration, half-

truths, lies, inappropriate remarks, unkind or filthy humour, gossip or destructive criticism, grumbling and complaining, hyper-critical words, unguarded statements and so on.

Children of light have different tongues: *"If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body"* (**James 3:2**). The tongue of the wise is health, and daily we should be working on being more truthful, clear, praising, life-giving, clean and pure, purposeful and timely. Paul says that the children of darkness commit fornication, uncleanness, covetousness, foolish talking. We should not be partakers with them, but be separate.

We cannot always disassociate with children of darkness physically, though sometimes there is a time for that. Paul says: *"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them"* (**Ephesians 5:11**). Here, *"reprove them"* means, show them to be evil by being light. Prove what is acceptable to the Lord by living in righteousness, truth and goodness.

How do we do this? By practicing the habits of consecration and communication. Consecrate every act to God. Consecrate your body to God. Consecrate your mind to God. Consecrate your finances to God. Then let your communication be a proclamation of truth, both in the content of your speech, and in the way you usually speak, which adorns the gospel with godly graciousness.

Well, our final walk is found in **Ephesians 5:15**: *"See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise."* The last walk is a walk of wisdom. Circumspectly means accurately – to walk with exactness. This is wisdom – skilful living. It is living life as God would want you to – the best possible application of knowledge at all times.

Wisdom comes from God, according to **Proverbs 2:6-8**: *"For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly. He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints."*

However, God gives wisdom liberally to those who ask, according to **James 1:5**: *"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."* So, if wisdom is seeing life the way God sees it, then walking wisely is responding to life in a way that God regards as skilful living.

## **How do I walk wisely?**

### **1. Make a habit of gathering wisdom**

Proverbs has 31 chapters – enough for each day of the month. If there is any book you want to start with for memorising Scripture, Proverbs is the place. It gives you guidance on money, work, discipline, romance, marriage, sexuality, sin, justice, pleasure, family, the tongue, stubbornness, revenge, anger, conflict, friendship.

There is also much insight on God's sovereignty, His power, trusting in Him and obeying Him – the list could go on. Much space in Proverbs is devoted to simply saying – get wisdom! Gather it, search for it – decide that it is important to you, and take the time to gather it.

## 2. Redeem the time

Paul uses this phrase in the following verse: *“Redeeming the time, because the days are evil”* (**Ephesians 5:16**). It means to buy back time – which is a graphic way of saying grab up your time – use it wisely. Make the most of it. Time is the one thing you will never have again. Time wasted can never be regained. It is forever gone down the drain of the past.

A walk of wisdom understands the fact that we are a passing wind, soon to enter eternity. As the saying goes, ‘Just one life to live, soon to pass, only what’s done for Christ will last.’ So buy up the moments, make them all count. Does this mean we are to live in a frenzied pace with no time to catch our breath? No, but it does mean we understand that every moment is a gift from God, to be used for Him.

Making this a habit means you can consecrate even your leisure time to God. It can be a time of refreshing and recharging, and not as some see it – to get respite from the work they hate. Leisure time and spare moments can still be given to God simply in our attitudes, in our meditations, in our silent prayers.

We often are unwise because we compartmentalise our lives – placing God in one box, family in another, work in another. We then say we cannot find time for them all. If we see all of time is on loan to us from God, then we can live every moment for Him.

## 3. Be hoping for Christ's soon return

**Titus 2:11-13** tells us of the effect that waiting on Christ's return will have on our lives: *“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.”*

Continually looking for *“that blessed hope”* causes us to live soberly – that is, wisely, in this life. John tells us that the hope of His return purifies us, as it should. Giving space in our thoughts to the fact that He could return today will truly put things into perspective. If you were to find out that Christ would be returning in exactly nine hours, how would it change your day? It would inject automatic wisdom into how to prioritise for the day, wouldn't it?

When Jesus gave a parable about the ten virgins to illustrate those who would be unprepared for His return, how did He describe them? Those who were prepared were wise, and those who were unprepared were foolish. In **Matthew 24:44-45**, He says: *“Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season?”*

We need to make a habit of having a readiness in our minds, a desire to depart, a hope for His soon return, to be with Him. **Hebrews 11** is the beautiful refrain of those whose eyes were so fixed on Heaven that this world and all its attractions had become a dull shade of grey to them. They longed for another city; they were citizens of another country.

Hope for the believer is not a hazy optimism; hope is used in the New Testament to mean a fixed assurance of things to come. We must lift our eyes from this life and its toils to the one to come. This is not being impractical – it is commanded as a way of increasing our walk of wisdom.

#### **4. Be sober and discerning**

Wisdom also consists of knowing threats, and how to deal with them. Threats will come in four areas: sin, the world, false doctrine and Satan. A wise walk is serious and clear-headed about how to meet these threats. When it comes to sin, it practices the walk of holiness we have looked at.

When it comes to the world, it does not love what the world loves, or esteem and admire what it admires, or compete for its honours. Rather, it sees the world system as essentially a system built upon values that have no eternal value – values built on the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life. We should practice observing this world with a detached gaze, never getting too close for comfort.

When it comes to false doctrine, John tells us in **1 John 4:1**, *“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.”* We are to be discerning, and test all Christian teachers against the Word. If they do not pass the test, **Romans 16:17** tells us to mark them, and avoid them.

Finally, when it comes to Satan, we are told to resist him, and he will flee. This does not mean rebuke him with endless incantations – it means, resist him with a holy life. The spiritual armour of **Ephesians 5** all has to do with character, not with supposedly binding Satan. Resist the devil with righteousness. Be aware of his tactics of deceit and fear. Overcome them with truth and trust.

So the walk of wisdom is grown by practicing the habits of gathering wisdom, redeeming the time, hoping for His return, and being sober and vigilant about threats to our walk with God.

Walking with God consists of many movements, but when memorised and frequently repeated, they all combine into a smooth and simple walk with God. It’s a walk of humility, and a walk in the Spirit. It’s a walk of holiness and a walk of love. It’s a walk in the light, and a walk of wisdom. Will it be said of us some day, like it was said of Enoch – he walked with God? It is within our grasp, if we will dedicate ourselves to developing these habits of holiness.