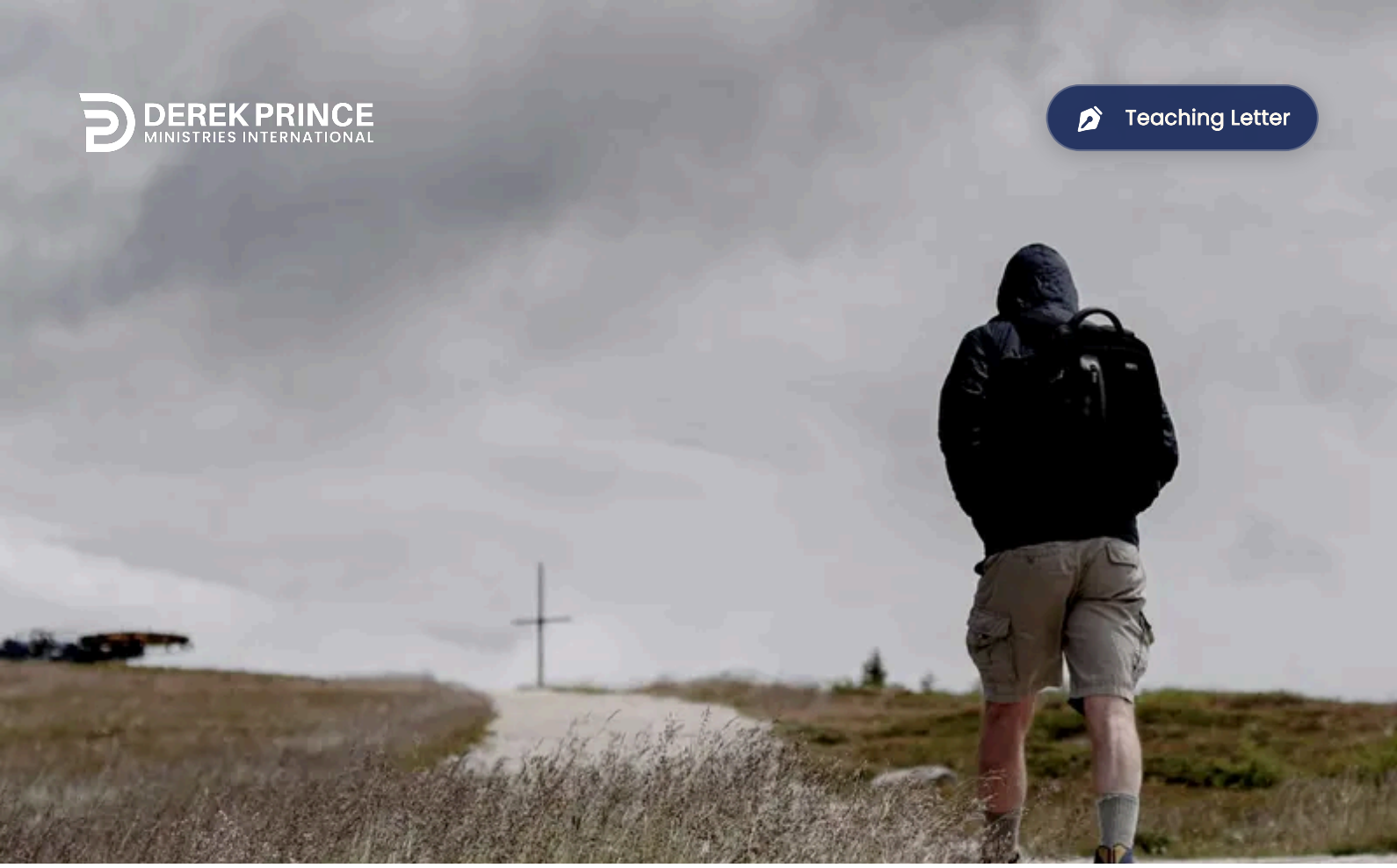


God Shows the Way



Part 1/2

Your Walk With God
By Derek Prince

"Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life" (Matthew 7:14, kjv). Here Jesus depicts the Christian life in two successive phases: first, a strait gate through which we must enter, second, a narrow way along which we must walk. The "gate" represents a single entry experience—what the Bible calls "being saved" or "being born again." The "way" represents the new kind of life into which this entry experience ushers us.

In effect, Jesus is warning us against trying to separate these two phases from one another. The only entrance into the narrow way is by the strait gate. Without being born again we cannot even begin to lead the Christian life. On the other hand, the purpose of entering through the gate is to walk in the way. The fullness of life to which Jesus invites us comes not merely by entering the gate, but by walking thereafter in the way to which the gate gives access.

The Way

It is most important that we do not view the Christian life as merely a static condition of "being saved" or "being a Christian." In the early beginnings of the Church the word Christianity had not yet been coined. What we nowadays call Christianity was then referred to as "the Way." For instance, when Saul of Tarsus set out for Damascus, he asked for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that "if he found any who were of the Way, ... he might bring them bound to Jerusalem" (Acts 9:2). Later, after Paul had preached for some time in Ephesus, two statements are made about the results: "Some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude" and "There arose a great commotion about the Way" (Acts 19:9, 23). (For other instances where Christianity is described as "the Way," see Acts 22:4; 24:14, 22.)

The same thought is presented in many other passages of Scripture. For instance, Paul said to the men of Athens, "In Him [God] we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). If we "live," we will "move." Life is never static or motionless. It always implies growth, motion, development, progress. Proverbs 4:18 tells us, "But the path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day." In this path of the Christian life we are continually moving forward to a fuller light. As we take each step along the path, the light becomes brighter. Yesterday's light is never enough for today. There is no room for

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standing still, much less for turning back. No matter how bright the past may have been, the future is brighter still.

Does this challenge to move continually forward along the Christian way sound difficult and demanding? Let me give you a word of blessed assurance: We are never asked to walk this path alone. The Lord Himself will be with us each step that we take. Under the Old Covenant He gave His people this solemn promise:

> Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand. (Isaiah 41:10)

Under the New Covenant the promise is confirmed to us by Christ Himself:

> Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:20)

Can Two Walk Together?

We must learn, then, to walk with God. This implies a continuing personal relationship with Him. Amos 3:3 poses the question: "Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" By implication, the answer is no. In order to walk with God, we must "agree" with Him.

By nature, however, we are not in agreement with God. On the contrary, Paul tells us in Romans 8:7 that "the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be." The "carnal mind" denotes the thoughts and attitudes that are natural to all of us before the grace of God begins to change us. These are in direct opposition to God, and no reconciliation is possible.

In Isaiah 55:8–9 God tells us plainly: "'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,' says the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.'" Furthermore, God will not change. In Malachi 3:6 He says, "For I am the Lord, I do not change."

Since God's ways and thoughts are quite different from ours, and since God will not change, there is only one possibility left. If we are to walk with God, it is we who must change: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts" (Isaiah 55:7). It is our ways and our thoughts that must be changed. This change requires a complete surrender and commitment of our whole being to God.

Whose Ownership?

In the first eleven chapters of Romans, Paul unfolds the complete provision of God for our redemption through faith in Christ. Then he opens chapter 12 with the words: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God... ." What is implied by the "therefore"? It indicates the response which is required of us in light of all that God has done for us. What is this response? It is stated in the words that follow:

> ... that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world; but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

The basic issue that Paul here deals with is that of ownership. As Christians, we can no longer claim to own ourselves. "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). The "price" with which we have been bought is "the precious blood of Christ" (see 1 Peter 1:18–19). Since God has bought us at such tremendous cost, we belong to Him, not to ourselves.

Although the legal right of ownership over our lives now belongs to God, He will not assert His right in opposition to our will. Rather, He waits until we see the logic of His claim and voluntarily present our bodies a living sacrifice. The word ***living*** points out the difference between the sacrifices of the Old Covenant and those of the New. Under the Old Covenant the bodies of the animals that were offered in sacrifice to God were killed. Under the New Covenant we offer our bodies to God still living. But in all other respects the handing over of our bodies to God is just as total and as final as it was with the animals offered under the Old Covenant.

This presenting of our bodies to God should be a definite, solemn transaction, which we may express in a prayer such as this: "Lord, in the light of the price that You paid to redeem me from sin, I see now that I no longer belong to myself, but to You. Therefore, I now solemnly offer myself—my body and all that it contains—to You as a living sacrifice. From this moment on, I ask You, and I trust You, to take

complete ownership and control of my life. In Jesus' name. Amen."

The Renewing of Our Mind

Once we have thus acknowledged God's ownership of our lives, the way is opened for Him to make the needed changes in our ways and thoughts. We begin to experience the "renewing of our mind." Then, as our mind is renewed, we begin to "prove [find out in experience] what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." We have already seen that our old, unrenewed mind "is enmity against God" (Romans 8:7). God will never reveal His will for our lives to this mind which is at enmity with Him. But as our mind is progressively renewed and brought into agreement with God, we are enabled to perceive God's will and to walk in God's way.

The process of renewing our mind affects three main areas of our life: the objectives we pursue, the motives with which we pursue them, and the means that we use to achieve them. By nature, we are all basically self-centered. Each time we face a decision, we ask ourselves such questions as: How will this affect me? What will I get out of this? How can I achieve the result that I desire? When we renounce control over our own lives and submit to the Lordship of Christ, all this begins to change.

We learn from Jesus' pattern prayer in Matthew 6:9–13 that the objective for this lifestyle is "Your kingdom come" and the motive is "for [God's] ... glory forever". Once the questions of objective and motive are settled, we face the question of means: How can I live so as to promote God's Kingdom and God's glory?

Scripture teaches, and our own experience confirms, that no effort or ability of our own is sufficient. We need some greater power. God's answer to this need is found in Zechariah 4:6: "'Not by might, nor by power [not by natural strength or will power], but by My Spirit,' says the Lord." The only power that will suffice is the power of the Holy Spirit.

Walking by Faith

Early in human history, we are presented with a picture of a man who learned how to walk with God: "And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him" (Genesis 5:24). In this continuing walk, Enoch developed such an intimacy with God that in the end it was more natural for him to maintain unbroken fellowship with God than to turn back to his own earthly home.

Hebrews 11:5–6 reveals the secret of Enoch's walk with God: "By faith Enoch was taken away [translated] so that he did not see death, 'and was not found, because God had taken him'; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please Him." The key word, repeated for emphasis, is faith. Faith is the essential, basic requirement for a walk with God that pleases Him.

What is faith? Hebrews 11:1 tells us:

> Now faith is the assurance [underlying substance] of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. (nasb1995)

It is a spiritual "sense" by which we discern things that are not revealed to our natural senses. It relates us to two unseen realities: God Himself and God's Word.

As Christians, Paul tells us, "We walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). Sight here stands for sense knowledge generally. It is presented as the opposite of faith. Faith renounces trust in the senses. Trust in the senses rejects faith. Thus each of us is faced with the question: Which is more real to me—God and His Word, or my own soulish impressions and sense knowledge?

True faith clings unwaveringly to God and His Word, rejecting the impressions of the senses whenever these disagree with God's Word. The great scriptural pattern of this kind of faith is Abraham. Indeed, Abraham is called "the father of all them that believe," and we are challenged to "follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham" (Romans 4:11-12). Paul's language here confirms what has already been said about the Christian life. It is not a static position, but a "walk" in which we continually progress by one step of faith after another.

How to Walk by Faith

A little further on, in Romans 4:17–21, Paul gives a specific example of Abraham's walking by faith. God had promised Abraham that he and Sarah would have a child who would become the father of a great nation. Yet both of them reached an age where this was a physical impossibility, and the child had not come. Faced with this conflict between what God had promised and what his senses told him about his body and that of Sarah, Abraham chose to hold on to God's promise, rather than be limited by the physical condition of himself and Sarah.

> He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He [God] had promised He was also able to perform. (Romans 4:20–21)

In this walk of faith, we are simultaneously in contact with two worlds. Through our senses we are in contact with the natural, physical world around us; through our faith we are in contact with the unseen, eternal world of God and His Word. In 2 Corinthians 4:18, Paul sets these two worlds in contrast. He says that God's purposes are worked out in our lives, even through affliction, "while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal." There is a deliberate paradox in the words that Paul here uses. How can we look at things which are not seen? The answer is: ***by faith***. Faith is the spiritual "sense" by which we discern the realities of the unseen, eternal world.

It is important to evaluate correctly the evidence of our senses. God does not ask us to close our eyes and ears and walk about as though the physical, material world around us did not exist. Faith is not mysticism. We do not question the ***reality*** of what our senses reveal, but we do question its ***finality***.

Abraham is the perfect example of this. His senses told him that he was physically incapable of begetting a child. Yet God had promised him a son. Abraham did not pretend that what his senses revealed to him about his own body was not real. He simply refused to accept it as final. Where God's Word promised him one thing and his senses told him another, he clung tenaciously to God's promise, without letting his senses cause him to doubt that promise. Finally, after his faith had been tested, the physical condition of his body was brought into line with what God had promised, and he became actually, physically capable of begetting a child.

Faith, in turn, is closely related to humility. In Romans 3:27, Paul tells us that boasting is excluded by the law of faith. In Habakkuk 2:4, boastful self-confidence and humble faith are set forth as opposites that mutually exclude each other:

> Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith.

The proud soul which is lifted up describes the person who trusts in his own natural ability and sense knowledge. The just who lives by his faith is the person who, like Abraham, renounces confidence in his own ability and what his senses reveal, choosing rather to trust in the unseen, but eternal, realities of God and His Word.

In Micah 6:8, humility is presented as a ***decision*** we are required to make in order to walk with God: "He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justly and to love kindness and mercy, and to humble yourself and walk humbly with your God?" (ampc). The phrase, "humble yourself," which accurately reflects the original Hebrew, indicates a decision which each of us needs to make: "Lord, I renounce confidence in my own ability and sense knowledge; I choose rather to trust in You and in Your Word. By Your grace I will walk by faith, not by sight." This attitude of self-humbling dependence upon God opens the way for a close, continuing walk with Him.

In our next letter, we will talk about some extremely practical ways by which we can cultivate a close walk with the Lord.

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