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Teaching Letter

We Must Do the Walking



Part 2/2

Your Walk With God
By Derek Prince

Every close relationship between two persons requires regular, two-way communication. Without this, such a relationship cannot last. Marriage is a good example. A man and a woman may enter into marriage with a real love for each other and a sincere desire to make their marriage a success. But if they do not establish and maintain regular, free communication between themselves, their marriage will soon begin to break down. The same is true of the Christian's relationship to God. Without regular, open, two-way communication, it will never succeed. We must learn both to speak regularly to God and to let God speak regularly to us.

How God Speaks

How does God speak to us? Primarily through His written Word—the Bible. The Bible is the basis of all that God has to say generally to all believers. Beyond this, God has specific things which He wishes to say to each of us individually. But we have no right to expect to hear from God in a special, individual way if we do not carefully search out all that God has to say to all of us generally in the Bible.

The Bible is both the basis of all true communication from God and the standard by which any other form of communication must be tested. However, merely reading the Bible by itself is not sufficient. In 2 Corinthians 3:6, Paul says, "The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." Apart from the Holy Spirit, all that we see in front of our eyes on the pages of the Bible is dead letters. But when these letters become the channel of the Holy Spirit, we no longer merely see them. We hear them in our heart as God's own voice, speaking to us directly and personally.

Many years ago, I proved this dramatically in my own experience. As a professional philosopher, I set out to study the Bible in the same abstract, analytical way that I would have studied any work of philosophy. I found it to be a remote, dreary, unintelligible book. Only a sense of duty made me continue reading. Then, after about nine months, God revealed Jesus to me personally as the Son of God and filled me with the Holy Spirit. The next day when I opened my Bible once more to continue reading, I was amazed at the change. It was just as though there were only two persons in the universe—God and myself. Every word that I

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read was God speaking to me personally. This is how every Christian should read his or her Bible.

In order to hear the Holy Spirit speak to us through the Bible, there are certain important conditions we have to fulfill.

Put Away Wrong Attitudes

First, we have to put away any wrong attitudes or relationships. James says: "Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word" (James 1:21). Filthiness could be defined as "unclean, unbridled imaginations"; naughtiness is the tendency to argue with God or to answer back. It is the opposite of meekness. In a similar vein, Peter says, "Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, … desire the pure milk of the word" (1 Peter 2:1–2). Here, then, is a list of wrong attitudes that must be dealt with before we can hear God speak to us through the Bible as we should. The laying aside of such wrong attitudes as these will enable us to approach the Bible with a meek, teachable spirit.

In Mark 10:14–15, Jesus sets up a little child as a pattern of how to receive the truth of God's Kingdom. The essential feature of a child's response—which Jesus emphasizes in this passage—is teachableness: an open willingness to learn without prejudice or preconception. In Psalm 25:5, King David utters a prayer that could well be a pattern for all of us as we open our Bibles: "Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; on You I wait all the day." The word wait suggests an attitude of quiet, patient expectancy. Hearing from God through His Word is so important that it demands a high place in the order of our personal priorities.

Manage Your Commitments

This concept is also well expressed in the prayer of another great man of God, Moses: "So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12). In other words, Moses says, help us to arrange our activities and commitments each day so as to leave the time that is needed for hearing from God and receiving the true wisdom which comes only from Him. "For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding" (Proverbs 2:6).

Be Doers of the Word

However, as James warns us in his letter, it is not enough merely to hear God's Word. "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22). He goes on to say that hearing God's Word is like looking in a mirror. It shows us the areas in our lives which are not pleasing to God. But we only benefit from this practically when we make the changes or adjustments the mirror indicates are needed.

In John 7:17, Jesus gives us a promise which is the key to understanding scriptural doctrine: "If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God." Knowledge of doctrine is granted only to those who are willing to do what they are taught. Obedience leads us on to further truth, but disobedience shuts off the truth and turns us aside into error.

Pray

Reading the Bible in this way, we hear God's voice. But this is only one-half of our communication with Him. The other half consists in prayer. In the Song of Solomon, the bridegroom says to the bride: "Let me see your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely" (Song of Solomon 2:14). This expresses the attitude of Christ toward His believing people: He longs to hear our voice and to have intimate personal communion with us. As we come to God in prayer, we always need to bear in mind that He is not indifferent or inaccessible. On the contrary, He loves to hear and to answer our prayers.

Relationship Is the Key

Prayer includes much more than mere petition—that is, a list of requests that we present to God. If we look again at the pattern of The Lord's Prayer, we see that the first half of this prayer serves to establish us in a right attitude toward God. Only after this are we encouraged to present our petitions. After all, Jesus reminds us, "Your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him" (Matthew 6:8). What matters in prayer is not so much to inform God of needs He already knows. The goal is to establish a relationship with Him such that we are confident of His supplying our needs.

If we depend merely on our own ability, none of us can pray as we should. Knowing this, God has made available to us the help that we need in prayer through the same Person whom He has appointed to interpret the Bible for us—the Holy Spirit. In Romans 8:26–27, Paul explains the part that the Holy Spirit plays in our prayers:

> Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we

> should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

Paul speaks here of *weaknesses* (translated *infirmities* in the kjv). In this context he is not referring to any form of physical sickness, but rather to a weakness inherent in our carnal nature. This weakness is expressed in two ways. At times we know we ought to pray, but we do not know what to pray for. At other times we know what to pray for, but we do not know how to pray for it. According to our particular situation, the Holy Spirit supplies us with the help we need, showing us both how to pray and what to pray for. The only acceptable prayer we can offer to God is one which He Himself first gives us through the Holy Spirit.

Led by the Spirit

Our dependence upon the Holy Spirit goes further still. It is not limited just to understanding the Bible or knowing how to pray. The Holy Spirit is God's appointed Guide to lead us in every phase of our Christian life. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (Romans 8:14). Thus we find ourselves in a double relationship to the Holy Spirit, corresponding to the double figure of the "gate" and the "way" referred to in our last letter (see Matthew 7:14). In order to become God's sons, we must be born of the Holy Spirit (see John 1:12, 13; 3:1–8). This is entering the "gate." Thereafter, in order to live as God's sons, we must be led by the Holy Spirit. This is walking in the "way."

A subtle temptation that often confronts us after we have entered the gate of the new birth is to substitute a set of religious rules for the personal guidance of the Holy Spirit. "If I pray and read my Bible an hour every day," we say to ourselves, "and if I attend church and pay my tithes regularly—and if I avoid certain forms of pleasure or entertainment—then I will lead a successful Christian life." But it does not work that way! Rules such as these—and many more—may all be very good and desirable. But they are no substitute for personal fellowship and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

In fact, by putting our trust in religious rules, we are actually dishonoring the Holy Spirit. If rules would do all that is needed, why should God give us His Holy Spirit? This is the mistake the Galatians were making when Paul wrote to them, "Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:3). The work that the Holy Spirit begins in our lives He alone can complete.

The Holy Spirit's Voice

Confronted by this need to be led by the Holy Spirit, Christians often respond, "But how can I be sure that it really is the Holy Spirit who is leading me? How can I recognize His voice?" At times I meet this question by another question: "If the phone rings and I answer it, how do I know it is my wife at the other end? How do I recognize her voice?" The answer, of course, is that I recognize my wife's voice because I know my wife. Intimate acquaintance with my wife makes it easy for me to recognize her voice.

The same applies in our relationship with the Holy Spirit. In order to recognize the Spirit's voice, we must cultivate an intimate acquaintance with the Spirit Himself. Many Christians do not appreciate the personality of the Holy Spirit. They realize that God the Father is a person and that Christ the Son is a person, but they do not see that the same is true of the Spirit. Yet He is just as much a person as the Father and the Son. We need to know Him in the same direct personal way that we know the Father and the Son.

The better we come to know the Holy Spirit, the more clearly we will hear His voice and recognize His various forms of guidance. When a married couple have lived together long enough, they develop ways to communicate with each other that do not require expression in words. A silence, a frown, a gentle squeeze, a special look—these convey more than whole sentences could communicate.

The same can happen in our relationship with the Holy Spirit. He does not always give verbal commands. He has various ways to influence or direct us: an inner check of warning, a silence of disapproval, a warm glow of encouragement, a nudge that prompts us to unpremeditated action. The more sensitive we become to the Holy Spirit's leading, the better we are able to walk in the world with peace and assurance as true sons of God.

What if we stumble?

Suppose that we stumble in our Christian walk—and even fall! Does that mean that we have failed and there is nothing we can do about it? Certainly not! Here are words of encouragement from King David:

> The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way. Though he

> fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with His hand. (Psalm 37:23–24)

David wrote these words from personal experience. He knew what it was to fall. At one period he committed adultery with the wife of a friend; and then, to cover his guilt, he procured the death of the man whose wife he had seduced. For a time he tried to keep his sin hidden, but God in His mercy brought it all out into the light through the ministry of the prophet Nathan. Through confession and repentance, David was finally forgiven and restored (see 2 Samuel, chapters 11 and 12).

The physical and emotional agony that David went through before he was willing to confess his sin is vividly described in Psalm 32:3–5:

> When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and You forgave the iniquity of my sin.

Thank God for that last phrase, "You forgave!" Never let the devil persuade you that you have gone too far or that your sin is too grievous for God to forgive. Remember, the devil is "the accuser" of all Christians (see Revelation 12:10). His aim is to keep us feeling guilty, unworthy, defeated. But God has made provision for our full forgiveness and restoration.

God's double provision for sin in the life of the believer is unfolded in 1 John 2:1: "My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin." This is the first part of the provision: "That you may not sin." Through faith in God's grace and power, it is possible for us to live free from the dominion of sin (see Romans 6:1–14). However, John continues: "And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." This is the second part of God's provision: If we do commit sin, we need only turn in repentance and humility to our Advocate, Jesus Christ. He will take up our case with God the Father and obtain for us complete forgiveness and cleansing. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Thus forgiven and cleansed, we can start out on our Christian walk once more without any lingering sense of guilt or unworthiness, being conscious not so much of our faith as of God's faithfulness.

> For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:6, nasb1995)

> Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass. (1 Thessalonians 5:24, nasb1995)

A Prayer of Commitment

You may be sensing a desire at this point to commit yourself more fully in your relationship with the Lord. That's a good desire, and you can be sure He also wants to walk more closely with you. To put your desire into words, let's close this teaching by praying the following prayer together:

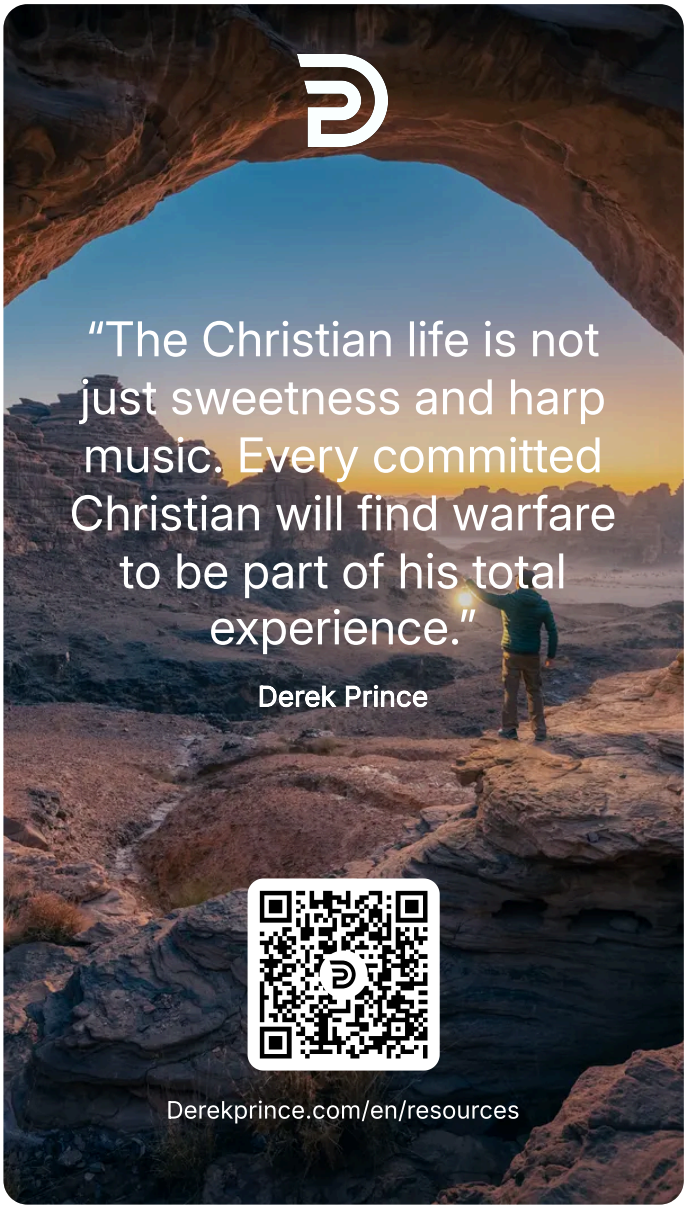
Dear Lord, My desire is to walk with You in the closest relationship possible. I want to hear You speak to me through Your Word. I want to hear the voice of Your Holy Spirit and be led by the Spirit into all You desire for me. I commit myself to put away any attitudes that are disrupting that process, and to approach You and Your Word with a humble, teachable spirit.

With Your help, I will take the necessary steps to move closer to You in our relationship and to be led by Your Spirit in more intimate acquaintance, in personal fellowship and in guidance. And, Lord, if I stumble, I thank You that You will uphold me with Your hand as I come to You in repentance.

Thank You, Lord, that You will complete the good work You have begun in me. You will bring it to pass. I rejoice in Your faithfulness, with great thanks that You will continually draw me closer and closer to You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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