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Introduction

Step by step

Sinless perfection?

Does one dance make me a dancer?

We know that whoever is born of God does not sin
the same anointing teaches you concerning all things

Old Covenant Anointings

The sons are free

Spontaneous Moral Originality

Spirit-led

Introduction

I am told, by those who ought to know, that I had to learn to walk three times. Most folks manage to do this just once but my slow learning was caused by recurring bouts of tonsillitis which laid this toddler low.

Most of us take walking for granted... until something goes wrong. Some years ago I tore the cruciate ligament in my knee and the knee locked in severe pain. I suppose in all the years that preceded it I had never given 30 seconds thought to my knee geometry.

When things are working well we hardly notice them. In the initial learning process our attention to what we are doing can become intense but once we have mastered the technique, it just flows.

Step by step

Walking is a word you would not usually spend time trying to define. After all, everyone knows what walking is. I am told that anatomists would argue it is a highly complicated process involving more than 200 muscles, but to the user, once initiated, it is a simple process.

First you decide where you want to be, and then you lift one foot and reposition it closer to your destination. Once you have completed this first 'step', you just do it again with the other foot.

As a child you learn that to take two steps at once is likely to meet with a crash. It is a skill that doesn't give much room for sophisticated variety. The simpler we keep it the less likely we are to fall on our faces. Perhaps that is why the Scriptures constantly use the idea of 'walking' for the way in which we continue what we have begun in 'receiving Christ';

▼ Col 2:6

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, Col 2:6 NKJV.

Some modern translations prefer to translate the word as 'live' but this confuses the picture as the Scriptures clearly distinguish between 'living' and 'walking';

▼ Gal 5:25

If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Gal 5:25
NKJV.

The idea of 'walking' as a picture of the steady step by step pattern of daily life is a favourite of Paul. He uses the idea almost 40 times in his writings. Usually the word he uses is the simple word for 'walking around' but occasionally he uses another word which has the sense of a more deliberate action; the idea there is of taking clear, specific steps; the sense of deliberate choice towards a destination.

He uses this word to describe Abraham's deliberate 'steps of faith' and again in the verse quoted earlier, 'walking in the Spirit' is not a gentle ramble but the making of deliberate choices that shows itself in the taking of definite steps.

Paul encourages his readers in Colossae to keep to the pattern in which they began. The verse could be translated simply as "having received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in Him". That makes a simple point even simpler.

We cannot continue until we have begun. We cannot 'walk in the Spirit' unless we have 'received Christ Jesus the Lord'.

This may explain the struggles that many young converts have and the different methodologies that we have devised to make their way easier. The point is, it is not possible to live in a New Covenant way unless we have been brought into that covenant. No amount of praying, bible reading, fellowship-ing, or discipling can alter that simple fact. It is the same basic truth that Jesus declared to Nicodemus;

▼ John 3:6

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. John 3:6 NKJV.

The Old Covenant was really designed for the Old Man and the New Covenant is designed for the New Man. The New Covenant functions in an entirely different way to the Old. The Old was good when it was used for its proper purpose;

▼ 1 Tim 1:8-9

But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers

and murderers of mothers, for manslayers... 1 Tim 1:8-9
NKJV.

The list continues but we have enough here to make an observation. The law was not designed to address individual transgressions but to expose the nature behind those transgressions.

Sinless perfection?

Does one dance make me a dancer?

Does one sin make me a sinner? The law, as Paul explains here, was intended to show the 'exceeding sinfulness of sin' and in that role it still has a limited purpose, but the law was not made for a 'righteous person'.

There is a construction in Biblical Greek that draws attention to the character rather than the act. We will try to keep this simple but it is created by putting a definite article 'the' in front of a present participle of a verb, e.g. 'believing'. To translate it literally would give 'the believing... ' and we would add the word 'person' to complete the sense. So we have 'the believing one' or more appropriately in English, 'the believer'.

▼ Digging Deeper: the baptising... one.



definite article in the nominative followed by a present participle

Participles.

He uses special signs to indicate special features in Biblical Greek.

He identifies 7 different ways that 'two words' can be understood.

4. the article in the nominative case followed by a Present Participle of a verb; "The doing_one", The Doer". This form indicates the Permanent Character of the person indicated.

Thomas Newberry's "English-Greek New Testament"

▼ Mark 6:14 NKJV

Now King Herod heard *of Him*, for His name had become well known. And he said, "John the Baptist is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him."

▼ Mark 6:14 ASV

And king Herod heard *thereof*; for his name had become known: and he said, John the Baptizer is risen from the dead, and therefore do these powers work in him.

Mark 6:14 GNT-BYZ

Καὶ ἤκουσεν ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἡρώδης, φανερὸν γὰρ ἐγένετο τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἔλεγεν ὅτι Ἰωάννης ὁ βαπτίζων ἐκ νεκρῶν ἠγέρθη, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἐνεργοῦσιν αἱ δυνάμεις ἐν αὐτῷ.

▼ John 1:33 NKJV

I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, "Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'

John 1:33 GNT-BYZ

Κἀγὼ οὐκ ᾔδειν αὐτόν· ἀλλ' ὁ πέμψας με βαπτίζειν ἐν ὕδατι, ἐκεῖνός μοι εἶπεν, Ἐφ' ὃν ἂν ἴδῃς τὸ πνεῦμα καταβαῖνον καὶ μένον ἐπ' αὐτόν, οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ βαπτίζων ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ.

If we inserted a name here and translated it according to the form of the ASV in Mark 6:14 it would read 'Jesus, the Baptizer'.

There are only two people in the New Testament record who are referred to as 'the Baptist'; John the Baptizer and Jesus the Baptizer... selah.

Many have baptised others but in the Scriptures only John and Christ himself are referred to as 'baptisers'.

A believer is not someone who believed once on a particular date in a revival crusade. A believer is a person whose life style is characterised by the fact that he is a 'believing one'. He may suffer deep trials but his underlying characteristic is that he is a believer.

The effect of the New Covenant in giving a new heart and spirit and God's own spirit coming within to take up residence is that the essential nature of the person is changed; the old heart of stone is removed and a new heart of flesh replaces it.

The characteristic of this person is that he is no longer a 'sinner' but a 'saint'. He may act un-characteristically in an act of sin, but this is against his nature and does not mean his character has changed.

We know that whoever is born of God does not sin

This brings us face to face with two very awkward passages of scripture in John's first letter. They produce a profound sense of unease in many Christians who read them. They are so absolute in the way they express a particular truth that many have just given up trying to include them in their theology. The first says;

▼ 1 John 3:6

Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. 1 John 3:6 NKJV.

And the second is much the same;

▼ 1 John 5:18

We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him. 1 John 5:18 NKJV.

If we put both together we find that someone who is 'born of God' and who 'abides in Him' does not sin. These verses certainly need to be unpacked carefully if we are not to damage the contents. So please bear with me if we proceed slowly.

It is a well-established pattern of interpretation of written documents that we take our initial understanding from things said first and then adjust our understanding later in the light of later information. This simply means that we need to go further back in John's first letter to be ready to understand the later statements.

Throughout John's first letter we get instances of that 'definite article followed by a present participle' effect. We said that this is the equivalent, in English, of putting the letters '-er' onto the stem of the verb to create words like 'believer' or 'baptiser'. This construction is drawing our attention to the character rather than to a single instance.

The word that John uses in these verses is the Greek verb 'poieō' which is a general purpose word meaning to make or to do. It is translated by various words in our modern translations; make, do, practise, commit and others. In these verses it is used with that 'article' plus 'present participle'; he is speaking of characteristic action not single events.

In the first instance he speaks of those who 'characteristically' do the will of God;

▼ 1 John 2:17

And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. 1 John 2:17 NKJV.

Or as we might paraphrase it "he who is characteristically doing the will of God".

In the second instance he speaks of those who 'characteristically' practise righteousness;

▼ 1 John 2:29

If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him. 1 John 2:29 NKJV.

Remember that Paul has informed Timothy that the law was not designed for a righteous man. Here John says that anyone 'born of God' is characterised by his righteous behaviour. In the third instance he speaks of some who 'characteristically' commit sin, those we might call 'sinners';

▼ 1 John 3:4

Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. 1 John 3:4 NKJV.

In the fourth instance he says that we are not to be deceived but that anyone who 'characteristically' behaves in a righteous way is righteous;

▼ 1 John 3:7

Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. 1 John 3:7 NKJV.

He follows this by stating the opposite truth that anyone who 'characteristically' sins, literally 'the sinning one', is 'of the devil';

▼ 1 John 3:7-8

He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. 1 John 3:7-8 NKJV.

In the sixth instance he declares that the 'characteristic' behaviour of a person shows whose children they are;

▼ 1 John 3:10

In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. 1 John 3:10 NKJV.

It is in this context of the continual repetition of the one idea that John's statements of

"Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him."

and

"We know that whoever is born of God does not sin;" must be understood.

John is not proclaiming a sinless perfection in which sin has become impossible to one who is 'born of God'. He is simply declaring that the characteristic pattern of behaviour of the regenerate is that they are, in the language of Ezekiel,

▼ Ezek 36:27

being caused to walk in God's statutes and keeping his judgments and doing them. Ezek 36:27

...as a result of God's indwelling Spirit.

the same anointing teaches you concerning all things

There is another theme in John's first letter that is equally important; it is the theme of truth. But truth for John is not so much factual accuracy but rather a right way of living;

▼ 1 John 3:18-19

My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. 1 John 3:18-19 NKJV.

In our Christian experience we may well meet with factual inaccuracy or doctrinal error at work and John is mindful of this but his references to the Spirit ensuring truth is not to be limited to wrong ideas, it must include wrong living. He says that they have 'an anointing' and that they know or recognise 'all things'. (1 John 2:20) but he turns them for their instruction, not to written codes of law but, to an inward working of God's spirit who will teach them how to live;

▼ 1 John 2:24-27

Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life. These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him. 1 John 2:24-27 NKJV.

It is another of John's absolute statements that leaves modern minds, which are used to a more gentle consensus, reeling.

Old Covenant Anointings

The ancient anointings were all external events but here John takes the imagery and internalises it; the anointing... abides in you. The persistence of the Scripture in insisting that in this new era truth is written within, on the heart, is conspicuous. It is no longer an outward expression written on tablets of stone that will be the guide to righteousness but an indwelling Spirit whose continuing presence forms the likeness of Christ in the heart. He will cause them to walk in his statutes and to keep his judgments and do them.

The righteous requirements of the law are thus satisfied in the righteous lives of God's New Covenant people but the 'handwriting' of that law is taken away. In one sense this New Covenant people does not 'keep' the Ten Commandments, it fulfils the greater law that was behind the Sinai expression. The Sinai law was given specifically to the Sinai Covenant people of God and several of its points were only possible when 'church' and 'state' were one and the same thing. The honouring of parents held the promise of a long life in Eretz Israel, the Promised Land. The Sabbath could only be kept precisely in a territory that was itself committed to the keeping of the Sabbath. Sabbath keeping outside the Land would always be a compromise. The 10 Commandments themselves were addressed specifically to a people with a specific history;

▼ Exod 20:1–3 ASV

And God spake all these words, saying,

I am Jehovah thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

As we have seen earlier, way back in Chapter 2, the Sinai Law was a unique application of universal law to a specific people in a specific context, but the universal law itself still holds true and has its witness as 'the work of the law written in the hearts' of men and women who have no link to the Sinai Covenant.

Behind the Sinai Covenant Law was a very simple but profound idea.

▼ Mark 12:30-31 NKJV

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy

strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. Mark 12:30-31 NKJV.

It was expanded into Ten Commands and numerous judgments but in essence it is very simple. In his epistle to the Galatians Paul reduces the man-wards aspect of the law to a single word;

▼ Gal 5:14 NKJV.

For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Gal 5:14 NKJV.

In fact, in the original language, 'you shall love' is one word!

The sons are free

While on earth Christ showed that the prohibitions of the Sinai Law were much more comprehensive than had been thought and that intention was no less a transgression than the outward performance. It is still true.

The specific details of the Ten Commandments were something like the way in which a beam of light entering a triangular prism is split into its different parts, but the original beam is seen in the simple but comprehensive statement

▼ Matt 22:40 NKJV

"thou shalt love"... ...God above all and your neighbour as yourself; On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets. Matt 22:40 NKJV.

We saw earlier that the moment of Christ's public acknowledgement as the Son of God marked a turning point in his life. Up until this time, so far as the record tells us, he was content to live his life within the circle of his family.

Luke's gospel tells us that in his early teenage years his heart stirred to be about his Father's work but it also tells us that under his family's rebuke he returned to Nazareth and was 'subject' to Mary and Joseph.

This is a wonderful glimpse into those hidden years. The general supposition is that at some time during the eighteen years between his visit to the temple and his arrival at John's baptism Joseph died and Jesus took on the headship of the family. That would certainly have been the pattern and there is no need to challenge it, but it seems that his 'subjection' to Mary may have continued into adult life. We might deduce this from the details of the miracle at the wedding in Cana. It seems that Mary was accustomed to 'instructing him' and at least (as do many fine mothers!) pointing him in the right direction. Perhaps his answer surprised her;

▼ John 2:4 NKJV.

Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come." John 2:4 NKJV.

The word 'woman' is not quite so stark as it might sound in English but the point is the same, he was consciously distancing himself from Mary, and from a previous pattern of behaviour.

Spontaneous Moral Originality

From the moment that he heard the Father's voice at Jordan he never again submitted himself to Mary. He loved her, respected her, made provision for her at his death, but never again would he subject himself to this old order.

The words from heaven had declared him to be a son and from this time he lived as one. Sons are free; Jesus said to him,

▼ Matt 26 NKJV.

┆ "Then the sons are free." Matt 26 NKJV.

A son lives in fellowship and harmony with his father and does not pattern his life on written rules and regulations. A much loved writer, Oswald Chambers, has a wonderful phrase for the pattern of life that Christ lived; he called it 'spontaneous moral originality'. Christ was not acting out a script nor conforming to an outward law, but his every act pleased his father.

26 NKJV.

A son lives in fellowship and harmony with his father and does not pattern his life on written rules and regulations. An older and much loved writer, Oswald Chambers, has a wonderful phrase for the pattern of life that Christ lived; he called it

'spontaneous moral originality'. Christ was not acting out a script nor conforming to an outward law, but his every act pleased his father.

Spirit-led

Matthew's account of the scene is interrupted by the positioning of a chapter break and the flow is easily missed; And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying,

▼ Matt 3:17-4:1 NKJV

"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Matt 3:17-4:1 NKJV.

The moment of the acknowledgment of sonship was the moment that he became Spirit-led in the sense of living independently from the Law and its cultural patterns. From this time onwards he is no longer subject to Mary or to the outward rules of his race, his behaviour sometimes appears erratic and bizarre. It is impossible to guess what he will do next. He is living his life with a 'spontaneous moral originality'. He fulfilled all righteousness but he did not do so by patterning his life on a series of commandments.

He was living the life of son with a father;

▼ John 1:14 Darby's Translation

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we have contemplated his glory, a glory as of an only-begotten with a father), full of grace and truth; John 1:14 Darby's Translation.

According to Paul, this pattern of life is what characterises the life of a 'son of God';

▼ Rom 8:14 NKJV

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. Rom 8:14 NKJV.

This is a definition of sonship that we hear little of in contemporary Christianity but it is one of the ways we may recognise those who 'have the Spirit of Christ'. This is the explanation of the occasionally unpredictable behaviour of Paul in the Acts of the Apostles. He is not living his life according to a set of rules; not Sinai rules, not 'Christian' rules, not even 'evangelical' rules; he is living a life of spontaneous moral originality.

"But won't this just result in every man doing what is right in his own eyes?"

Not if the safeguards are all in place, and it is to these that we must turn next.

In this chapter we considered the questions of 'sinless perfection' and the 'anointing'. We also introduced Oswald Chambers' phrase 'Spontaneous Moral Originality' and saw that Christ did not live his life according to a script but in daily dependence on the leading of the Spirit. We saw that Paul said that this way of life is what identifies 'the sons of God'. We saw too that all of the Old Covenant commandments can be condensed into a single idea... 'you shall love'.

▼ Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Step by step](#)

[Sinless perfection?](#)

[Does one dance make me a dancer?](#)

[We know that whoever is born of God does not sin
the same anointing teaches you concerning all things](#)

[Old Covenant Anointings](#)

[The sons are free](#)

[Spontaneous Moral Originality](#)

[Spirit-led](#)