

How “NOT” to Walk

Message 15

2/19/23

Ephesians 4:17–32 (CSB)

LIVING THE NEW LIFE

¹⁷Therefore, I say this and testify in the Lord: You should no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thoughts. ¹⁸They are darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them and because of the hardness of their hearts. ¹⁹They became callous and gave themselves over to promiscuity for the practice of every kind of impurity with a desire for more and more.

²⁰But that is not how you came to know Christ, ²¹assuming you heard about him and were taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus, ²²to take off your former way of life, the old self that is corrupted by deceitful desires, ²³to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴and to put on the new self, the one created according to God’s likeness in righteousness and purity of the truth.

²⁵Therefore, putting away lying, **speak the truth, each one to his neighbor,** because we are members of one another. ²⁶**Be angry and do not sin.** Don’t let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷and don’t give the devil an opportunity. ²⁸Let the thief no longer steal. Instead, he is to do honest work with his own hands, so that he has something to share with anyone in need. ²⁹No foul language should come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear. ³⁰And don’t grieve God’s Holy Spirit. You were sealed by him for the day of redemption. ³¹Let all bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander be removed from you, along with all malice. ³²And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ.

Intro. Can we take a moment and process what we've just read and heard?

A. The more I read this passage, the more it challenges me.

1. The conjunction "therefore" in verse 17 anchors everything that Jesus has done for us and connects that work to us.

2. If a person was to read the first 3 and a half chapters of Ephesians only, we could feasibly believe that the individual believer has no part to play in God's plan of salvation.

3. However, Paul's "therefore" shifts toward us.

B. Because of what Jesus has done, because of who God is, and because of the presence of the Holy Spirit, we must "walk worthy of this calling" and not walk as the Gentiles do.

1. Paul is very clear:

2. It is possible to walk rightly BECAUSE of what Jesus has done for us.

a. Paul declares it is possible to live a life that is not characterized by:

1. Anger

2. Slander and profanity.

3. Promiscuity

4. Sin and stupidity.

b. Paul does not give us any legitimate excuses for walking in disobedience.

c. For the many of you who learned to march in the military, I doubt your drill instructors accepted any excuses for your marching out of step.

C. I love observing elementary school hallways because it's like the evolution of dance happening as kids find a million ways to walk without walking right.

1. One of my favorite things on Sunday morning is when the toddlers go past the back doors to their toddler church.
2. They NEVER walk like an adult; they walk like a kid.
3. Every teacher tells the kids, "walk right."
 - a. The Apostle Paul, serving as an Apostle for Ephesus, is fulfilling a mix between a drill instructor and an elementary teacher.
 - b. And his message here is "walk right," "take off your old life," and "put on what is new."
4. This series of messages seems appropriate for the season we are in:
 - a. Many of you are following the revival happening at Asbury.
 - b. How did it start: a student confessing his sin and repenting.
 - c. Repentance never asks for permission to sin again.
 - d. These next couple of weeks will shine the spotlight of Scripture into the darkest areas of our lives.
5. "I want you all to know I love you. And the way I can love you the best is by being truthful and clear. Even we disagree, know that I'm speaking out of my love for Jesus, Scripture, and you. I hope you still love me when this series is over."

1. Paul opens this passage by contrasting the "walk worthy of your calling" with how to NOT walk in Christ.

A. Do not walk like the Gentiles.

1. But they were all born gentiles, just like Paul was born a Jew.
2. What Paul has in mind is not ethnicity.
3. Paul declares that their present lifestyle must look different than their past lifestyle.

4. How they walk is not based on where they came from but who they are now in Christ Jesus.

Eugene Peterson, in his book *Practicing Resurrection*, explains it like this:

a. He said that the Greeks and Gentiles understood morals, but morality had nothing to do with religion and was not for normal people.

b. But the men and women in the street, mostly unschooled, along with a considerable slave population, wouldn't have been much affected by the philosophers. In the imagination of the common people, Zeus and Hera presided over a pantheon of sexually profligate and murderously rapacious deities. The stories the Gentiles told about their gods and goddesses sometimes showed remarkable psychological insights and were endlessly entertaining, but they were also devoid of righteous moral content. Artemis, the reigning goddess of the city of Ephesus, was a fertility figure on public pornographic display, an idol carved with a thousand breasts. So that is the world that seems most likely to be behind the term "Gentile" here - not so much an ethnic designation in contrast to Jew but a reference to this culture that was rich in religious imagination and so impoverished morally.¹

B. Paul had to shift the Ephesian understanding away from the gods of their past to the God of their present and future.

1. The God that saved the Ephesian believers was not like Zeus or Artemis.

a. They were not sleeping around.

b. They were not torturing each other.

c. God was nothing like what they had spent a lifetime of worshipping.

2. Growing up in Christ requires laying aside what you used to know, believe, and practice and embracing the newness of Christ.

3. If we don't lay that aside, we end up with dangerous a dangerous form of syncretism.

a. Syncretism is the mixing of various beliefs and gods into a new whole.

b. Paul wasn't inviting the people in Ephesus to add Jesus to their gods but to proclaim Jesus as the ONLY God and the ONLY source of salvation.

c. Paul declared the necessity of laying aside what used to be and embracing a new life.

4. If we, as American Christians, are not careful, we merely add Jesus to our old ways instead of living a new life in Christ.

C. If we are to accept this passage of Scripture, we have to admit a few things:

1. First, there is truth.

a. And not "your truth" versus "my truth."

b. But absolute truth.

2. Second, there is a way Jesus expects us to walk.

3. Third, standards are not the same as works.

a. We are all Protestants in this room, believing we are saved by grace and not works.

b. But we mistakenly throw out the idea that faith and belief are followed by action and work.

c. Paul invests the first 3 chapters describing all the great things God has provided that we did NOTHING for.

a. Seated in the complete work of Jesus.

b. THEN, Paul describes how we are to "walk."

c. And these next several paragraphs are full of verbs and commands and actions meant for us.

2. This effort is necessary because our “default” condition is broken.

A. Look how Paul describes our former way of life:

You should no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thoughts. ¹⁸They are darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them and because of the hardness of their hearts. ¹⁹They became callous and gave themselves over to promiscuity for the practice of every kind of impurity with a desire for more and more.

1. First, our way of thinking was messed up: Futile and dark.
2. Second, our default condition is excluded from the life of God.
3. Three, The old life is ignorant.
4. Four, our hearts were hard.

B. This is followed by callousness and the practice of every kind of impurity.

1. Vs. 19. The word used for “callous” is rare and means “the ultimate in moral depravity, a lack of shame or guilt for any sin or vice.”¹

a. when there is no shame or guilt, there is no repentance.

b. **We do not repent of what we are proud of.**

2. Would it be safe to say that the world, apart from Jesus, lives and thinks in a way that is: futile, dark, excluded from real life, ignorant, and without shame?

C. Paul’s definition of life apart from Jesus is just as accurate today as it was then.

¹ Bratcher, Robert G., and Eugene Albert Nida. 1993. [*A Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians*](#). UBS Handbook Series. New York: United Bible Societies.

1. Often, we are shocked at how many people think and act the way they do.
2. But I point you to the futility of their thinking.
3. With Jesus, we think differently, see the world differently, and interact differently.

Next week, we will dig in further as Paul tells us to “put away” and take off our old ways of living and put on a new self.

3. What must we do to start walking differently?

A. First, Repent of past ways and flare-ups.

1. Let me repeat this:
 - a. **We do not repent of what we are proud of.**
 - b. The other day, one of our kids in children’s church used a bad word.
 - c. He was pretty proud of it, but he didn’t know it was a bad word.
 - d. Part of the parenting and leadership process is to inform the kid “that’s a bad word.”
 1. One of the teenagers dropped this wisdom:
 2. Under-exposure is just as bad as over-exposure.
 3. *Could it be that we have God-loving people living in sin because no one has ever clearly taught them the Scriptures?*
 - e. But if he or she keeps saying it, then it goes from an accident to a willful sin.
2. I believe the Lord has been dealing with many people in this room over the last few months.
 - a. God is showing you that what was permissible as a new believer is not permissible now.

b. God does not reveal our sin because He hates us, but because He loves us.

3. As God shows us areas needing repentance, would you repent and then ask for His help to stop?

B. Second, renew your mind daily.

1. Most of us remember all our mistakes, and very few of our victories.

a. "Our memories are only as good as our last mistake."

1. In 2018, the special assistant to the Air Force Surgeon General did research that says it takes 5 positive comments to offset every one criticism.²

2. Some of you Army and Marine guys think you didn't hear 5 positive comments the whole time you were in the military.

3. But it seems right: It only takes 1 negative to deflate a lot of good.

b. This is where Satan wants you to live.

c. Too many of us think about God for an hour on Sunday and believe it will offset the other 167 hours during the week.

2. Did you notice that what Paul confronted about the Gentile way of life was mostly areas of thinking?

1. First, our way of thinking was messed up: Futile and dark.

2. Second, our default condition is excluded from the life of God.

² <https://www.airforcemedicine.af.mil/News/Display/Article/1499653/51-feedback-improves-medical-care/#:~:text=The%205%3A1%20feedback%20ratio%20is%20an%20important%20Trust ed%20Care,for%20every%20one%20criticism%20given.>

3. Three, The old life is ignorant.

4. Four, our hearts were hard.

3. Paul told the Romans, "be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

a. Daily, I need to think about what Jesus has done and what He is calling me to.

b. I'm not talking about placebos, or karma, or daily affirmations.

c. I am talking about reminding myself that Jesus loves, me, I am forgiven, and I am empowered with the Holy Spirit.

d. I don't have to sin today; that power was broken years ago.

C. Measure our life by the right standards.

1. Did you ever correct one of your kids, and they tell you, "but so-so's mom lets them do it?"

2. As believers, the world is not your standard; Jesus is.

3. Vs. 24 "We are to put on the new self, the one created according to God's likeness in righteousness and purity of the truth.

4. In the beginning, we were created in the "image of God."

a. Sin marred the image and fastens us into the image of sin and the curse.

b. But through Jesus, we are to put on a new life that looks like God's righteousness, purity, and truth.

Closing/Prayer

Dedication, confession, repentance

ⁱ Eugene H. Peterson. Practice Resurrection: A Conversation on Growing Up in Christ (Kindle Locations 2190-2194). Kindle Edition.