



## PRINCIPLES FOR A NEW WALK

Catalog No. 1330  
 Ephesians 4:17-24  
 Fifth Message  
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 September 8th, 2002

**Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.** (Eph 4:1, NASB)

In this series of messages from the book of Ephesians we are learning about the makeup of the Church and how Christians should conduct their lives. We are focusing especially on this verse, what it means to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.” Over the past three weeks we have discussed this “walk” in the context of the Church, speaking about the themes of community, unity, diversity, and maturity. Over the next four weeks we will turn our attention to walking worthy in the context of the world, sin, and the patterns that enslave us.

Even Christians at times feel they are destined to continue behaving as they did before they came to Christ. We want to change, but we feel helpless. We are new creations in Christ, yes, but living out that reality seems beyond us. An old 70s song went, “Like a rat in a maze the path before me lies / And the pattern never alters until the rat dies.” We feel impotent to alter the established patterns of our lives. We think we are destined to continue with wrong and unhealthy behavior until the rat dies. Well, the reality is we can walk in newness of life. The worthy walk means that we must learn to live a different kind of life, one that is available to us now that we are in Jesus.

Our study this morning contrasts the unworthy walk and the worthy walk. The text which lays the groundwork includes a number of principles relating to the new walk.

**So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.** (Eph 4:17-19, NASB)

The example to avoid, says Paul, is that of the “Gentile.” The word refers to an unbeliever, a person who has no relationship with God. Paul’s assumption is that the saints in Ephesus once “walked” like the Gentiles walked, but now they must stop that. Walking like the Gentiles is not consistent with God’s design for living, because their walk is characterized by spiritual and moral darkness. It is an unworthy walk.

Paul uses four telling phrases that serve as motivators for believers to walk in a manner worthy of the people of God, encouraging those who think they cannot break out of sinful patterns. Christians are destined to change, because the power of God gets us past that point of discouragement and defeat.

“In the futility of their mind” is the first phrase. “Futility” means without purpose, pointless, empty. Walking in the way the world walks results in living a meaningless life. The things that the Gentiles pursue have no lasting or eternal value. The unworthy life is an empty life. Hear what the Lord said to Jeremiah: “Thus says the LORD, ‘What injustice did your fathers find in Me, that they went far from Me and walked after emptiness and became empty?’” (Jer 2:5).

“Being darkened in their understanding.” Here again Paul emphasizes the condition of the Gentile mind. The unbelieving mind lacks understanding. Unbelievers live in darkness. They are devoid of truth. They cannot perceive reality, because they live in a land of make believe. They subscribe to philosophies that are false and misguided. As the song goes, “Hello darkness, my old friend, I’ve come to talk with you again.”

“Excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart.” Unbelievers lack any true spiritual life or desire to pursue God. Their minds are dark and empty because they do not have the life of God within them. They are completely disconnected from God because of ignorance and a hard heart. Man must be enlightened in order to have eternal life. The things that keep people ignorant are a hard and stubborn heart, an unwillingness to ask for help, to admit need. That is why mankind chooses to live in darkness, avoiding the light.

“And they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.” The life of the unbeliever is characterized by moral depravity. A darkened mind, a dead spirit and an immoral lifestyle all go together. Absent the worship of God, sex becomes the idol that man worships. Spiritual darkness and misguided thinking always lead to moral decay.

The two words “callous” (the inability to feel shame or embarrassment), and “greedy” (a desire to acquire more and more), mark the life that is enslaved in sensuality. The first time one engages in immorality, the tender conscience warns that something is wrong. But, after repeated failures, one grows more and more callous

to feelings of guilt, and the moral compass no longer functions.

The immoral lifestyle is also characterized by greediness. The appetites are never satisfied. People who are enmeshed in sexual addiction always have to push the limits, going deeper and deeper into darkness, always hoping but always failing to fill the emptiness within.

These four descriptive phrases capture the world in which we live. We merely have to pick up a newspaper or watch the news to see the manifestations of darkness, futility, godlessness and immorality in our world today.

How can Christians apply these words of Paul?

### **1. Use common sense to avoid an unworthy walk.**

Observing how the world lives in moral and spiritual darkness, it makes no sense to want to live that kind of life. It is purposeless, empty, dark, devoid of real life, and enmeshed in sensuality that never satisfies. That kind of living is unworthy of our new identity in Christ. It is inconsistent with all that we have been given in the Lord. Let this be a motivation for us to not pattern our lives after the world, after people who do not know God.

### **2. Be careful how you perceive and relate to the unbelieving world.**

We must not walk like an unbeliever—but we do have to watch our attitude. We must not feel we are superior. We are called to walk in a different manner than those who do not know God, but this does not mean that we are better than them. Many Christians make that mistake. They build walls to shield themselves from contact with people they regard as beneath them spiritually, mistakenly imagining that if they quarantine themselves they will be protected. Believers have the opportunity and capacity to be better, but we are not better. We must not isolate ourselves from the world but, rather, live transformed lives in the world.

How then do Christians, in Paul's words, "walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called"? How do we live transformed lives in the midst of a dark world? We have to go to school, says the apostle.

**But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. (Eph 4:20-24)**

We must become students again. The pupil is the believer in Jesus; the Christian walk is the learning process. This doesn't happen instantly or naturally. We "heard" Christ, we are taught "in him," and now we learn to walk like him. Notice that we are not being

taught about him, but "in" him.

The subject of our study is the truth as it is in Jesus. This is the standard. This is not a class in situational ethics. Everything must be based on the truth that is in Jesus, because this is the truth that sets men free.

The main principle that we need to learn and implement is centered around a new wardrobe that we receive when we come to Christ. As Isaiah put it so beautifully in his prophecy:

I will rejoice greatly in the LORD,  
My soul will exult in my God;  
For He has clothed me with garments of salvation,  
He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness,  
As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,  
And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. (Isa 61:10)

When I moved to California from Nebraska in the early 70s, I brought my midwestern wardrobe with me: high heel platform shoes, black and white polyester pants and animal-patterned shirts. Then I married my wife Liz. She had a very different taste in clothing. She got me a new wardrobe. New clothes began to appear in my dresser and old clothes began to disappear in the garbage. This is the principle we learn as we walk in Christ.

We put off the old man, the former life that is corrupted by deceitful desires. The old man is the rat that has died. Our old man has been crucified with Christ. We have died to sin. However, we still have the memory patterns and the habits of the old man—and this is the very thing that we are to lay aside. It is a corrupt, filthy garment that is only going to continue to rot and decay.

Next, we need to "be renewed in the spirit of our minds." Notice how much of what Paul says refers to the mind. Our minds are filled with faulty logic, futile thinking and darkness. We need to renew, retrain and reprogram them with the truth as it is in Jesus. A correct understanding of truth is essential to practical Christian conduct. If we are going to live differently, we must learn how to think differently. We can't just change our behavior.

Finally, we are to put on the new man, the new wardrobe that we have been given. The new man is created according to God. The new man is characterized by righteousness and holiness. This is who we are in Christ, and this is why we are to continually clothe ourselves with the robes of righteousness and the garments of salvation.

All of us are familiar with this three-step process: lay aside, renew the mind, put on the new, yet we all struggle here. It seems so simple, but it is not. I hope these principles will be helpful.

### **1. Putting off the old man will not be easy.**

Living differently requires that we learn a new way

of living. That's hard to do. Old patterns are deeply engrained. We are surrounded with the world's philosophies and sensualities, and we are prone to become what we see. The fact that we have to take off the old man means that our initial response, our natural inclination, will be based on the old man.

Let me give an illustration of how strong that old man is. Last summer I was in an automobile accident in Vancouver. Sitting in the passenger seat beside me was a dear friend who had lost his wife earlier that year. The thought that my friend could have been killed, leaving his two young sons behind, sent me into shock. When I exchanged information with the other driver, incredibly, I gave my former address in Nebraska, my home that I left thirty years ago! I was stunned. Where did that come from? I wondered.

It seems that our natural responses are so much a part of us that we react that way in a crisis. Just like a golfer who either hooks or slices the ball and has to learn a new way to swing the club, so we have to learn a new way of thinking when we come to Christ. The old way of thinking fits like a comfortable old shirt. It's hard to give up.

## **2. The battle occurs in the choices we make daily.**

The principle that we must learn and apply is to take off the old man—to be renewed in the spirit of the mind—and put on the new man. This must become part of the many choices we face every day. As we grow in Christ we become more aware of the patterns of our actions. I have found that at the point of decision, the Holy Spirit slows down time and I am more and more conscious of my choices. I can lay aside the old man any time I want to if I make that choice. I can be arguing with my wife, but when the doorbell rings I can make the choice to lay aside the old man before I answer the door. That's not hypocritical. I was choosing to live in the old man, but when the circumstances called for me to lay that aside, I could do so. It's a choice that I make.

The older we get the more time we have to make choices and the more aware we are of what we are doing. It's helpful to think about the predictable and repetitive patterns of our lives and then think about the results. This will help us make the choices we need to make.

## **3. We are not two different people.**

Although it might feel like it, we are not two different people. The old man has died. He has been crucified with Christ. However, the memory, the behavior patterns, still reside in our flesh, seeking to control our behavior. We have a new nature, but the old man still tries to convince us that we have to act a certain way. But we don't. We are in the process of learning how to behave true to who we really are in the new man, the new creation in Christ.

## **4. Often we must choose and act contrary to our feelings.**

If we are going to live differently we must learn how to think properly. Right action comes from right thinking and right understanding. Renewing the mind is a continuous process. We cannot always trust our feelings. We must obey, and trust that our feelings will follow. This is where it is helpful to know our emotional makeup. It is important to know whether we are a "thinker" or a "feeler," whether we are subjective or objective, emotional or unemotional. Since I am a "feeler" it is hard for me to get my feelings lined up with who I am in Christ. I try to. I hope I can. But I know from years of experience that I can't. My feelings will betray me at times, and I often have to take a step of faith that runs contrary to them.

## **5. Even though our feelings betray us, they are still important.**

Even though much of what Paul says deals with the mind, and though we act contrary to our feelings, we should not shut off our hearts and emotions and limit our Christian conduct to our intellect only. Part of renewing our minds has to do with who we are in Christ, believing not just in our minds but also in our hearts that we are blessed, chosen, loved and forgiven. The fact that we are sons and daughters means that we are very special to God.

## **6. Walking worthy is more than just dealing with externals.**

We must guard against merely acting in a different way externally, as this leads to legalism. Proper behavior and right living flow from a renewed heart and a renewed mind. We can't put the new man on over the old man. When we recognize unhealthy or unworthy behavior we must look inside as well as attend to the outside. In the past we learned from the old man how to cope with the pain we feel inside, seeking to numb the emotions of anger, loneliness and worthlessness. We must be honest about these emotions and take them to God. Oftentimes this is the process we go through that gives God access to the deepest places of our hearts. This deep work of the Holy Spirit is what will set us free from the sins that enslave us.

## **7. Walking worthy is not the requirement for grace but the result of grace.**

We are not learning to walk differently in order to be loved and accepted by God. We walk differently as a result of that very love and acceptance. If we think we will gain God's favor or people's favor through our good behavior we will be living under law, depending on our own strength, and failing miserably.

## **8. The goal is not perfectionism but progress.**

Perfectionism is not the goal. We will stumble and fail. When we do, we must not punish ourselves. We don't have to linger in discouragement and defeat. That only leads to more addictive behavior. We just need to get up, be renewed in our mind, and start over.

While we cannot expect to become perfect, we should

expect to become a whole lot better. We are all addicted to some kind of wrong behavior. So let's not pretend we're perfect. Instead, let's encourage one another on the journey, trusting the God who is able to make us stand, and producing the fruit of the Spirit who is working mightily within us to enable us to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we have been called."

Let these words of Charles Wesley encourage us as we learn to walk in the truth as it is in Jesus:

*Plenteous grace with Thee is found, grace to cover all my sin;  
Let the healing streams abound; make and keep me pure within.  
Thou of life the fountain art, freely let me take of Thee;  
Spring Thou up within my heart; rise to all eternity.*

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