

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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The Christian Life - The Christian Walk

I attended a conference in the Lake District during the summer. Outdoor activities included high or low level walks. To participate I had to:

- put my name on a list on the notice board
- obtain provisions and a map
- put on the correct gear
- arrive at the meeting place at the appointed time
- then start to walk
- and follow the country code.

The Christian walk is different in that it's a lifelong occupation not a special activity. However, it's useful for our talk today to note these similarities:

- you must first 'sign-up' to the Christian faith by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord before you can set out on the Christian pathway.
- to sustain you as you live for God in this world, you're provided with His Word and His Spirit.
- your map is the Bible, which provides both area and pathfinder directions: *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path"* (Psalm 119:105).
- you must have the correct gear. You must wear the Christian uniform: *"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ"* (Galatians 3:27).
- you must set out. Scripture always encourages practice: *"This is the way, walk in it"* (Isaiah 30:21).
- you must always follow the code: *"put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts"* (Romans 13:14).

This *Truth for Today* series is entitled *"The Christian Life"*. The Christian walk is an essential component of it. In fact, several times the New International Version uses 'live' in its translation of the word 'walk' to emphasise it's about what Christians do. It's their lifestyle! Its actions not just beliefs. I assume that, as the hymn puts it, you want to 'walk with Jesus Christ all the days [you] live of this life on earth, to give to Him complete control of body and of soul'? However, let me first challenge you as to the reality of your faith in Christ and of your commitment to follow Him as one of His disciples. It's necessary to stress that choosing to be a Christian believer, commits you to the Christian way-of-life. There're some ideas in the world at large that 'good works' show that you're 'Christian'. But good works do not make you a Christian. That only comes through faith in Christ for salvation: *"we [are] justified by faith...for...all are sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus"* (Galatians 3:24 and 26). A scriptural illustration of this point would be the miraculous sign Jesus performed when He healed the lame man at the pool of Bethesda, John 5.

If you're truly a Christian, then you'll know Christ personally and you'll have a spiritual link with Him. The apostle John makes this point about Christian profession: *"He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked"* (1 John 2:6). A real Christian should be like Christ in both attitude and character. This was certainly true of the first disciples who earned the nickname "Christians" because they were recognised to be like their Master (Acts 11:26). Peter confirms this definition in his letter when he discusses suffering as a Christian (1 Peter 4:16). He amplifies its meaning in 2:21-23: *"For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: "Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth"; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously"*. The first lesson we learn about the Christian walk is that God wants us to behave like Christ. He called us to this lifestyle by the Gospel. *"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them"* (Ephesians 2:10). The second lesson is that we can only live the Christian life by abiding in Christ, as 1 John 2:6 has reminded us.

Christians have the example of the apostles in addition to that of the Lord Himself. So Paul exhorts us in Philippians 3:17: *"Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern"*. The twenty-first century Christian lifestyle should be no different to the first century Christian lifestyle! But in verses 18-19, Paul

warns that people can make a mere pretence of Christianity: *“For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame - who set their mind on earthly things”*. Furthermore, even true Christians can be out of step with the truth of the Gospel and the Spirit (Galatians 2:14 and 5:16).

Because we've been saved by the grace of God, our lives must change from what they were before our salvation: *“you [are now] alive, who were [previously] dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once [walked] in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others...I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind”* (Ephesians 2:1-3 and 4:17).

Nor should we follow our natural instincts to walk according to our sinful desires. It's so easy to remain in what the Bible calls a carnal state and to walk in a human way. We must have: *“renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God”* (2 Corinthians 4:2). Sometimes our lives can be dominated by the 'here and now' causing us to walk by sight instead of by faith. Some Christians even *“walk disorderly and not according to the tradition...received from [the apostles]”* (2 Thessalonians 3:6). It's possible to be lazy and not to face up to life's responsibilities! Even Christians can be misguided: *“some...walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies”* (2 Thessalonians 3:11).

However, the majority of New Testament exhortations about the Christian walk are positive, not negative, instructions. In particular, Paul's letter to the Ephesians provides much guidance on the subject.

First of all, we're to be like God himself because we're part of His family (Ephesians 5:1). Earlier in this letter, Paul urges us to “walk worthy” of our calling and to be different from the rest of mankind (4:1 and 17). Our lives should openly show that God has called us to be His children, that is, His adopted sons. The Christian calling is described as a high or heavenly calling, and a holy calling. Our walk must reflect such spiritual blessings!

Paul explains what to “walk worthy” really means in the practical section of this epistle (Chapters 4-6):

- We're required to: *“walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma”* (5:2). In His life our Saviour showed that He loved the Lord His God with all His heart, with all His soul, with all His strength, with His entire mind, and His neighbour as Himself. In His death He demonstrated His love for His church. 1 John 3:16 tells us that this is how we know what love really is. If we walk in the way of sacrificial love, and love God's family, this will bring pleasure to God. We may even have to pay the ultimate price, as Christ did. But, according to Ephesians 4:1-16, we'll certainly have to walk with all lowliness and humility; we'll certainly have to walk with gentleness and longsuffering; we'll certainly have to bear with one another to walk in love; we'll certainly have to speak the truth to each other to walk in love. We must also make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. In these ways the church builds up itself in love.
- In 5:8 and 10, Paul continues to explain what to “walk worthy” really means: *“now [that] you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light...and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord”*, (English Standard Version). God is light; therefore Christians must avoid all evil. There's to be no hint of sexual immorality, any kind of impurity, greed, obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, amongst God's people. They're not to be idolatrous. They're not to be disobedient to His word. Paul tells us in verses 9 and 14 that the fruit of the light is to show all goodness, all righteousness, and every truth; and that we can get this light from Christ Himself by looking up to Him in heaven. The Lord Jesus said: *“I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life”* (John 8:12). When we walk in the light, we'll both expose and reprove the dark ways of the sinful world (verses 11-13).
- Because such a lifestyle pleases the Lord, Paul continues to exhort believers in verses 15-17: *“See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is”*. Christians must put careful and prayerful effort into how they live. Through reading the scriptures and prayer, each will come to realise what the Lord wants in the different spheres of life: in the church, in the family, in the work-place, and in the Christian warfare (5:19-6:20). The secret of walking wisely is to be filled with the Spirit and to allow Him to control your life (5:18).

The exhortations in the Epistle to the Colossians are similar to those in Ephesians. For example, Paul writes about the disobedient way of life of unbelievers, and urges the Colossian believers: *“in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these [things]: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have*

put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him" (3:7-10). This is different to deciding what to wear each day. It's making a conscious decision always to wear the new man, that is, to reproduce the characteristics of Christ! To achieve this Paul tells us we must fully depend on the Lord in every way: *"As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving"* (2:6-7). To have an effective Christian testimony, we should: *"Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside ... [and] let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one"* (4:5-6).

But Paul first prayed for the Colossians: *"that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding; so as to walk in a manner [which is] worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work"* (1:9-10, English Standard Version). "Worthy of the Lord" means that our walk must be of like value, in God's estimation, as the walk of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself! In simple terms it means that everything you or I do in life must be such that everyone will say "that person's a true Christian. That person's Christ-like"! Paul elsewhere insists that believers' lives should be worthy of the Lord:

1. Our walk should be worthy of the gospel of Christ (Philippians 1:27). There were some evident inconsistencies with this aim due to the disagreements within the Philippian church.
2. Our walk should be worthy of saints (Romans 16:2). In the New Testament, the name "saints" applies to every believer and shows that we've been set apart for God. Therefore we must be holy in every aspect of our lives. In Romans 16 it's about how believers receive each other for practical Christian fellowship.
3. Our walk should be worthy of God (1 Thessalonians 2:12). This requirement is expanded upon in 4:1-12, where Paul emphasises the need for purity and honesty in all our ways. In 5:18, he encourages believers to give thanks to God in every circumstance of life. It's in all the details of everyday living that we're to please God, the God who has called us to His own kingdom and glory!

Here, in this prayer for the Colossian believers, Paul continues that we must aim to please the Lord in every way (1:10, New International Version). Hebrews 11:5 states that Enoch's walk actually achieved this because he lived a godly life in a corrupt world. Genesis 5:22-24 tells us that Enoch walked with God for over 300 years! Noah also walked with God, whilst Abraham, Isaac, David and Hezekiah walked before God. There's much to learn from the lives of these Old Testament saints.

In Colossians 1:10-12, Paul also prays that their walk would be:

1. fruitful;
2. increasing;
3. strengthened; and
4. thankful.

A walk **fruitful** in every good work means that the character of my life should be so complete that I bring pleasure to God in everything I do. In John 15 the Lord Jesus Christ Himself referred to the necessity of His disciples abiding in Him, the true Vine, to achieve this objective.

A walk that is **increasing** means I'll be growing in, and by, the knowledge of God. This is the way it all comes about. It's like the branches of the natural vine receiving sustenance from the plant itself.

A walk that is **strengthened** shows that I need to be fortified for the many difficult experiences of Christian living. Christians are therefore strengthened, that's empowered, not to perform supernatural acts, but to walk steadfastly and to be able to endure life's trials. Spiritual strength is also required to enable believers to be longsuffering with people who prove to be contrary either to the Christian message, or to the Christian way of life. Paul recognises that we need to be strengthened according to the manifested power of God's glory to exhibit these features, patience and longsuffering, with joy. It's above, and goes beyond, just putting up with adverse circumstances or difficult people!

The Christian walk should be characterised by **thankfulness**. Specifically, we should be marked by giving thanks to the Father, the source of all of our blessings in Christ. Verse 12 explains the reason for responding to the Father with a deep sense of gratitude: *"[He]...has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light."* The amazing fact is that we share together the inheritance, the place of coming glory, in and with Christ, Ephesians 1:11. Our ability to respond to the Father is because He has fully fitted us for this glory. He rescued us from the control of Satan and brought us into the kingdom of the Son of His love. In this kingdom Jesus is Lord, and we must show this by our life style, and walk worthy of Him!

To summarise, the New Testament admonishes us to walk the Christian life.

1. We must be true to our Christian baptism: *“we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life”* (Romans 6:4).
2. We must live by the power of the Holy Spirit in ways that please God: *“that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit”* (Romans 8:4).
3. We must honestly reflect the One who is the Light of the world. *“Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts”* (Romans 13:13-14). The Lord Jesus said that when we let our lights shine before men they will glorify our Father who is in heaven.
4. We must be consistent and remain true to the Christian faith, despite what the world may think or do. *“No longer should [we] live the rest of [our] time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles - when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you”* (1 Peter 4:2-4).

Finally, my prayer is that you and I will live our lives worthy of the Lord!

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