

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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## Ephesians - it's all about Christ: Walking after Him - Ephesians 4:17-5:2

The word "walk" is central to the scriptures we are considering today. The word refers to the way in which a person conducts himself in everyday life. For example, "John the Baptist looked upon Jesus as He walked and said, 'Behold the Lamb of God!'" (John 1:36). He saw Christ in all the perfection of the burnt offering of old. It was an offering that was fragrant to God. So when Jesus was called "the Lamb of God", it spoke of Him as a man who was completely acceptable to God (on the one hand) and of God's own provision (on the other). There was not a single blot upon His life. His walk was marked by love and holiness. Peter witnessed of Him in Acts 10:38, "...God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him."

This leads us into Ephesians 4:17, where we read: "This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind..." The Apostle Paul is here addressing the Christians at Ephesus as *individuals* living out their lives for Christ in an evil world. It is for this reason that he speaks as one witnessing in the Lord. This emphasises two things. First, it shows the Ephesian Christians the authority by which he speaks and, second, it reminds them that it was this very Person whom they had confessed as Saviour and Lord.

A summary of Christian conduct is found in the following verses:

*Walking with Jesus day by day;  
Walking in truth along the way;  
Led by the Spirit as children of light  
Walking by faith in God's keen sight.*

*Help us, O Lord, good works to do;  
Help us to walk worthy of You.*

*Walking humbly in the day  
Honesty marking all we say.  
Walking in life complete and new  
His wisdom guiding all we do.*

*Help us, O Lord, to be faithful and true;  
Help us to walk, in love, with you.*

It was John Nelson Darby who wrote, "...but the whole walk of the Christian ought to be the manifestation of a new life." [Notes on the Epistle to the Ephesians] Therefore, the Ephesian believers were responsible to have a conduct that was distinct from the other unbelieving Gentiles. The life that they were to live was one that ought to glorify the God who is both light and love. It is a purpose-filled life! The Apostle reveals that the conduct of unbelievers was the very opposite; owing to their ignorance, they were strangers to the life that God would have them lead. They were characterised as having depraved minds and a distorted understanding. They were described as being hard in heart and past feeling. They lived in a way that gave licence to their filthiness and extreme greed.

"What a terrible picture!" you may say; but isn't that the case in the world today where many unbelievers fit this exact description? In general, people are becoming increasingly ignorant of God. In fact, the media seems to take every opportunity to belittle or oppose faith in God. Others are not only giving licence to their own perversions (under acts like those for so-called "Equal Rights"); but are actively promoting those perversions claiming them to be "natural". We could say that this evil world needs a moral revolution! But is there a government today with enough courage to take up such a cause? I venture to say, "No!" However, when the Lord Jesus Christ returns as King of kings and Lord of lords, He will rule in righteousness. He will rule with a rod of iron! In His day, there will be a return to the ways of God. The result will be peace and prosperity.

Some of the basics of the Christian walk are found in Ephesians 4:20-24 where the Apostle presents Christian conduct as flowing from a knowledge of Christ and of the truth as it is in Jesus. He first emphasises that Christ is

exalted and that Christians need to recognise His supremacy. He then uses the personal name of our Saviour, "Jesus", to show that His life was the perfect example of one who walked with God here on earth. The hymn writer, M. Bowly, put it this way:

*Jesus, how much Thy name unfolds  
To every opened ear;  
The pardoned sinner's memory holds  
None other half so dear.*

*Thy name encircles every grace  
That God as man could show;  
There only could He fully trace  
A life divine below.*

The Apostle Peter, writing in his first epistle chapter 2, speaks of the wrongful suffering to which the Jewish Christians were called and then writes, "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously..." (1 Peter 2:21-23).

Paul also uses the name "Jesus" to emphasise that Christian conduct should be in line with the truth He taught while here. Therefore, our conduct as Christians should reflect both the teaching of Jesus and His attitudes and behaviour in the varying circumstances of life. You could argue that is too difficult for an ordinary man to walk with God; but in Genesis 5:24 we have the record of a man who did! It states: "And Enoch walked with God..." Christians today have a major advantage over Enoch. They are indwelt by the Holy Spirit who empowers them to live a holy life. So, as both born again (having a divine nature) and indwelt by the Spirit they have the ability to walk with God.

In Ephesians 4:22, we read of a "former conversation" in the Authorised Version of the Bible. This simply refers to the previous manner of life of the Ephesian believers in their unconverted state. The "old man" mentioned there is a term that is directly linked with their previous behaviour. This "old man" refers to the inner self that had the knowledge of good and evil, but chose unrighteousness and corrupted himself according to the desires of his wicked heart. A description of the former lives of these Christians is found in Ephesians 2:1-3. There, they were marked by trespasses and sins; were greatly influenced by ways of the world as under the rule of the devil; and they fulfilled the evil lusts of both their hearts and their minds. Hence, this "old man" was cast away like an old garment by these Christians when they trusted in Christ. Hamilton Smith notes, "The Apostle does not say we are to put off the old man, but says, 'having put off ... the old man'. The old man has been dealt with at the cross, and faith accepts what Christ has done. We have not to die to sin, but to reckon ourselves as having died to sin in the Person of our Substitute." [*The Epistle to the Ephesians*] It is the same for those of us who profess Christ as our Lord and Saviour today. We have cast aside all the evil of our past lives and have been "renewed in the spirit of our mind" to serve God. We have put on the "new man". Jesus is the perfect expression of this new man. It is that which bears the character of God Himself in "righteousness and true holiness".

Note, this new man is created by God. It is not a remodelling of the old man. It is something entirely new! When a person puts her or his faith in Christ, she or he is a new creation and is responsible to display a manner of life that shows this. We could say, along with Hamilton Smith, "The new man has the knowledge of good and evil, but is righteous, and therefore refuses the evil." [*The Epistle to the Ephesians*] May we, as children of God, show in practical terms that we have put on this new man. The sincerity of those who say they have become Christians, but show no positive change in their behaviour towards godliness, may be rightly questioned. As Jesus Himself said, as recorded in Matthew 7:20, "...By their fruits ye shall know them."

In the Ephesians 4:25-5:2, the Apostle Paul outlines the practical behaviours that relate to the new man and, therefore, to the expected conduct of Christians. The list begins in Ephesians 4:25 where we read: "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another." This is better translated in Darby's New Translation as: "Wherefore, having put off falsehood, speak truth every one with his neighbour, because we are members one of another." All that is false has been banished. Christians are to be truthful to one another. By using the phrase "members of one another" Paul is showing that, should we lie to our fellow Christians, we are lying, indirectly, to ourselves.

The Apostle then deals with righteous anger in Ephesians 4:26. We read: "Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath." When addressing evil, Christians may express anger in a right way. The Lord Jesus was angry in this way in Mark 3:1-6 where we find Him healing a man with a withered hand. Before doing so, He had asked those who sought to trick Him whether it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath days; but they wouldn't answer Him. We then read: "And when he had looked round about on them *with anger*, being grieved for the hardness of their

hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other." (Mark 3:5) He also demonstrated a righteous anger when He overturned the tables in the temple (see Matthew 21:12). However, even this anger is not to be sustained when the evil has been removed or rebuked because it may go on to prompt bitterness and sin. Hence, the Apostle wants even righteous anger to be short-lived. This is seen in the expression: "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath."

Ephesians 4:27 states: "Neither give place to the devil." If we turn to 1 John 5:18 we see that the new man does not succumb to the enticement of Satan. We read: "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not." However, we must be alert, because the old nature we have (called the "flesh") could so easily cause a believer to fall or to fail. Take Simon Peter for an example. He was full of self-confidence when he said that he wouldn't deny the Lord Jesus (Matthew 26:35). When later challenged by unbelievers, he failed (Matthew 26:69-75). He denied his Lord! He had given place to the devil. Christians, we all can fail in the same kind of way today. Let us take to heart the words of the children's chorus that included words like:

*"Be careful, little eyes, what you see!  
Be careful, little ears, what you hear!  
Be careful, little mouth, what you say!  
Be careful, little hands, what you do!  
Be careful, little feet, where you go!"*

It had a refrain something like,

*"For your Father up above, is looking down in love.  
So be careful..."*

We then come to Ephesians 4:28 which states: "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth." Here we see how the life of the "new man" is contrasted to that of the "old man". The old would have no conscience about stealing to satisfy his greed or need; but the new man sets himself to work in order to make a living and to give to those in need. I recently heard a minister of God's Word speaking on the subject of "Humility" and summarising it with an acrostic of the word JOY, J-O-Y. "Jesus first," he said. "Others second. Yourself last! That's humility!" This may be seen as a simplification of what is meant by humility; but it certainly expresses the order of things with the Christian. God comes first. Others come second. Self - well, that should not be seen at all!

This brings us to Ephesians 4:29 of which states: "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers." There are no half measures here! Words that are spoken by Christians should be wholesome - Words that benefit the hearers, words that give strength to the faith of fellow Christians. In 1 Timothy 6:3-4 we find: "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings." So here you have the words of Christ as an example of "wholesome words". The rest of the verse reveals the kind of communication that comes from unbelievers. Also, we see more words of the Lord Jesus described in Luke 4:22: "And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth." Then we see Simon Peter speaking to the Lord in John 6:68: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." The opposite to such communications are found in Ephesians 5:4 where we read of things that should not be named among Christians: "Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks." May our words be wholesome and gracious. Furthermore, may they tell of Christ and eternal life. Additionally, may they be marked by expressions of gratitude both to God and others.

This leads us to Ephesians 4:30 that says: "And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." There are three main points to consider here.

1. Grieving the Holy Spirit of God;
  2. The sealing with the Holy Spirit of God; and
  3. The day of redemption.
1. **The Spirit of God may be greatly saddened by any unholy thought, word or action of the Christian.** This shows that the Holy Spirit is a Person with feelings. He is the One who helps us to live lives acceptable to God.
  2. **The Christian is sealed by the Holy Spirit of God.** This sealing was discussed in the talk on Ephesians 1 where we read: "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until

the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.” (Ephesians 1:13-14). Sealing is a mark of both possession and security. The Holy Spirit indwells every Christian and shows that each belongs to God and, as such, is protected by God.

3. **The day of redemption refers to that glorious day when the Lord Jesus Christ shall come to take His church to Himself.** Every believer will then be given a glorious body - a spiritual body - a body that is immortal! (1 Corinthians 15).

Some of the unholy things that would grieve the Holy Spirit are found in the next verse. It reads: “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice” (Ephesians 4:31).

If those things grieve the Spirit, then the things listed in verse 32 must give Him joy: “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.” Here we see the goodness of God. He has forgiven us for the sake of His Son. This is the springboard from which that same goodness and love should leap in us being shown in kindness, compassion and care towards our fellow believers and, thence, to all men.

We now arrive at Ephesians 5:1 that says: “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children...” As a consequence of God’s goodness to these Ephesian believers, they were now to be followers of God. The word “followers” comes from a root word that means “imitators”. So they are to be God-like. They cannot be (and are not) asked to imitate God in His deity, but they are encouraged to be like Him in a moral sense. All those qualities that mark God should flow out from the Christian. Some of these qualities are found in the Fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23 where we read: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law”. We could easily add wisdom to this list.

Note also the relationship that Christians have with God, namely, we are His children. As those who have been born again, we are the children of God. But we are “dear” children. His love, care and affection is active for us. It also implies a Christian walk governed by affection. A servant may walk rightly in legal obedience, but it becomes a child to walk in loving obedience.

This leads directly to the example of Christ Himself in Ephesians 5:2 that states: “And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour.” The Ephesian Christians are told to walk in love. This is to be expected since the nature of God is love. As those who partake of the divine nature, all Christians can’t stop themselves from loving. However, this verse shows that Christian love is to be gauged against the love of Christ. In Him we see the devotedness of love that gave Himself for others, and this devotedness ascended to God as a sweet-smelling sacrifice. It is a love that is prepared to sacrifice self for others that Christians are to imitate. Love like this will rise up to God as a sweet savour. For example, the love that led the Philippian assembly to meet the necessities of the Apostle was to God “an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God” (Philippians 4:16-18). “An offering” is that which is presented to God for His pleasure. A sacrifice emphasises the cost to the giver.

We close with the challenge of 1 John 3:16: “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he [Christ] laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”

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