

WALK AS CHILDREN OF LIGHT

Ephesians 5:1–21

Key Verse: 5:8

“...for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.
Walk as children of light...”

Have you ever noticed how you walk? Some people scurry. Others shuffle, or plod along, making a lot of noise. Some are so light on their feet, you hardly notice them. Some hobble or have an unusual gait. Some walk exactly like one of their parents. It's fascinating. But walking is more than a curiosity. Sometimes, unaware of our surroundings, a walk can take us into a really dangerous situation. In today's passage Paul uses the image of walking to illustrate Christian life. As his children, we're told to learn to “walk” like our Father God. God is love (1Jn4:8b). God is light (1Jn1:5). We're called to imitate him by walking in his love and walking in his light. But what does that mean? How can we do it? And why should we? May God open our hearts and speak to us through his word today.

1. Walk in love (1–7)

Paul has just been talking about our new “walk.” Our new walk begins with our inner life (4:17–19). Our new walk is possible only as we receive our “new self” from our Lord Jesus Christ (4:20–24). Our new walk means learning to speak truthfully, overcoming our anger, being givers instead of takers, speaking gracefully, not grieving the Holy Spirit, and instead of creating conflicts, being kind, tenderhearted and forgiving (4:25–32). Now Paul continues describing this walk.

Read verse 1. “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.” Paul says here that we're “beloved children.” The Greek expression means God loves each one of us as if we were the only child he had. That's intense! When we experience how much he loves us, we can't help but want to imitate him. There are so many things about God to imitate. But Paul has a focus here. What is it?

Read verse 2. “And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” He's talking about Christ's sacrifice for us on the cross. He loved us so much that he died! He held nothing back. He gave us his all. Though it was for us, Paul stresses here how God responded. To God, it was a fragrant offering. Christ's love for us pleased God. It moved God. It tells us that walking in Christ's sacrificial love is mainly about pleasing God. And the Bible tells us that as we

learn to walk in his love, we start spreading “the aroma of Christ” everywhere (2Co2:14–15). When we’re walking in our sin or pride or selfishness, we’re giving off a stench. But when we’re walking in the totally self-sacrificing love of Christ for sinners, we’re giving off his fragrance.

Sometimes we misunderstand love. We think it means ignoring all kinds of bad behavior, fully accepting people just as they are. But this can lead us to compromise with sin, in the name of love. Paul immediately refutes this idea. Read verse 3. “But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.” Of course Jesus received sinners and ate with them (Lk15:2b; 5:30). But he came to call sinners to repentance (Lk5:32). When we turn to him, he forgives us, but he also expects us to change. Nobody can truly follow him and insist on living in sin. We live in a world filled with all kinds of sexual immorality, all kinds of impurity, all kinds of covetousness. But our Lord Jesus calls us to holy living and to be living among his holy people. Paul says in Romans 12:9, “Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.” Pursuing God’s holiness is walking in real love. Walking in love, in real passion for his holiness, is a key element of our new self (4:24b).

Paul again mentions that our new walk involves our speech. Read verse 4. “Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor coarse joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.” People swear and talk dirty as a bad habit. Most people aren’t even aware they’re doing it, or consider it as normal. But such speech is inappropriate for God’s children. Walking in love means replacing such coarse words with words of thanks. If we really love each other, we’re willing to change the way we talk.

Paul ends this part with a strong warning. Read verses 5–7. “For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them...” This makes it clear who Paul is talking about. He’s talking about people who claim to be believers, but are still insisting on being sexually immoral, impure, or on coveting material things. Paul is definitely not teaching us to be judgmental toward people outside the Christian community or to refuse to be around them. He writes in 1 Corinthians 5:9–11, “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.” This clear

attitude is so necessary to help our brothers and sisters who've fallen into sin to really repent before God. We call it walking in holy love.

2. Walk in light (8–14)

Paul goes on to develop further what our new walk looks like. Read verse 8. “...for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light...” This is no self-righteous walk. We ourselves used to “be” darkness. We were ruled by the darkness of our sin, and by the devil. But now, by God’s one-sided grace to us in Jesus, we have become “light in the Lord.” Wow! It’s amazing that his grace makes us “light in the Lord.” We were terrible sinners, but God’s grace and mercy on us in Jesus, and his perfect patience, gives people an example of how to believe in Jesus for themselves (1Ti1:13–16).

And now, as recipients of this grace, we’re called to “walk as children of light.” This is the sixth time in Ephesians Paul uses this word “walk” (2:2,10; 4:1,17; 5:2,8). What a great word to help us understand Christian life! So often, people talk the talk but do not walk the walk. Christianity isn’t about going to church, saying all the right things, then disappearing the rest of the week and living just like people who don’t believe in God, pursuing all the same worldly goals. Christian life means walking as children of light each and every day. Walking in God’s light makes us stand out as different. And people notice not so much our talk, but our walk.

It’s fascinating to watch an infant learn to walk. Some pick it up faster than others, but eventually, as long as there’s no physiological problem, they get it. It’s hard at first, and they fall down many times, cry, and get some boo-boos. But pretty soon, walking becomes so natural. We develop muscle memory until we can walk without even thinking about it. In the same way, as we trust God’s great love for us and keep coming into his light, we learn to walk as children of light.

Paul takes a moment to explain what he means. Read verse 9. “...(for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true)...” Just as the image of walking is practical, so is the image of fruit. If we’re living in God’s light, then real fruit starts growing in our lives. What’s the fruit? It’s “all that is good and right and true.” These words aren’t abstract concepts; Paul is talking about both character and behavior. Essentially, “good” means generous. “Right” means both holy and just. “True” means not fake or deceptive. Paul is describing the fruit of our new self, “created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (4:24). God is generous. God is holy and just and right. God is true. Walking in his light is how we imitate him, how we grow in godliness like him.

With this new image of walking as children of light, Paul gives us one specific direction to follow as our top priority. Read verse 10. "...and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord." This is a radical change for all of us. In our sin we're focused on pleasing ourselves. But walking in the light means always trying to figure out what pleases our Lord Jesus. If something pleases him, we're happy to do it, even if it's hard. If something doesn't please him, we don't want to do it, no matter what. The Bible tells us plainly what does and does not please God. But in many situations it's hard to see how the Bible teachings apply. But that doesn't mean we should just do whatever we want. Walking in the light means trying to discern what pleases Jesus our Lord. Romans 12:2 says, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

And it's not just about our own personal struggle. Walking as children of light involves shining his light. Our Lord Jesus said, "You are the light of the world...let your light shine before others..." (Mt5:14,16) But what does that mean? Read verse 11. "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them." Just as before, this is not really about going out into the non-believing world to expose people. It's about shining God's light within our believing community. If some people are claiming to be Christians but doing shameful things in secret, we shouldn't ignore or condone it, but deal with it. The word "expose" is repeated here twice (11,13). It doesn't mean to shame, embarrass, humiliate or crush, but to help people. Read verses 13–14a. "But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light." God's light helps people experience real conviction for their sin, so that they can stop hiding and faking, repent and be healed. Coming into God's light is hard, and painful, but it's so healthy because it brings real healing and freedom.

God shines his light in order to help anyone, no matter how sinful. Partly it's through his people, but mainly it's through our Lord Jesus himself. Read verse 14b. "Therefore it says, 'Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'" If we're not walking in the light, we can become a sleeper. We can become spiritually lazy and almost dead. But when we're called to wake up spiritually and come into the light, Christ shines on us. He makes us alive. He gives us power to get up, walk in his light, and shine his light.

3. Walk in wisdom (15–21)

In this last part Paul mentions the word "walk" one more time. Read verse 15. "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise..." Actually, in Greek the word "carefully" applies not to the word "look" but to the word "walk." So it's not *looking*

carefully but *walking* carefully. We're to walk carefully, not recklessly. This is called "wise." Paul explains it further. Read verse 16. "...making the best use of the time, because the days are evil." In Greek it literally says "redeeming the time." It means "taking advantage of every opportunity." In today's language it would be "don't miss a beat." We have opportunities to shine God's light every day, in our families at home, at school or work, with friends or strangers, or at church. Being wise is kind of like being tuned into God's light 24/7, so that if God gives us any opportunity to shine his light, we're spiritually ready to take it. "...because the days are evil" means the devil is always working against God, against God's people and against his kingdom work. So being wise is walking in God's light, always ready to fight the good fight.

Paul contrasts being unwise or wise, foolish or understanding, and drunk with wine or filled with the Spirit. Basically he's saying that to walk in wisdom, we need to be filled with the Spirit. We receive the Spirit when we first believe in Jesus, but each day, as we walk in the light, we need to ask God to fill us with his Spirit. What does a life filled with the Spirit look like? Read verses 19–21. It's a joyful, unashamed life, freely singing all kinds of songs of praise; it's a thankful life at all times and for everything, focused on God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ; it's a life full of reverence for Christ, and out of that reverence, being submissive to all kinds of people in our lives.

Read verse 8 again. "...for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light." May God help us improve our walk. May we turn to our Lord Jesus, to learn to walk in his great love for others. May we remember God's grace to make us light, and help us walk as children of light, repenting of our own sins and helping others also. May God fill us with his Spirit so we can walk in his wisdom, full of praise, thanks and submission.