

Lamar E. Cooper, Sr.
Interim President
Executive Vice President & Provost
Criswell College

Learning How to Walk

Ephesians 4:17-32

Part 1

Introduction

For the past year, I have been sharing with the faculty and students a principle that is actually a key principle of Scripture. It is this simple truth, "blessing follows obedience." This theme is prominent in Scripture and is revealed through terms such as "blessed," "blessing," "obey," "obedience," "keep," and "walk." I have actually found nearly 2,000 references related to one or more of these words that shed light on this key principle in God's Word. The concept of our "walk" is one of those terms, and it is very prominent in Ephesians and very relevant for our understanding of the remainder of Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus.

Indeed, blessing follows obedience, and blessing produces multiplied blessings. The earliest example of this principle in Scripture is found in Genesis chapters five to nine. It is there we read "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord," Gen 6:8. Noah was the only one who stood for righteousness in a wicked and perverted world. If you carefully trace his spiritual heritage, you will discover that God's selection of Noah to preserve the human race was not arbitrary. Actually, the basis for God's choice is revealed in Noah's heritage. In Genesis 4:25-26, we are told that Seth was the replacement for the death of Adam and Eve's son Abel. When you trace the line of Seth, you discover that his son was Enosh, Gen 5:6, his grandson was Cainan, Gen 5:10, his great grandson was Mahalalel, Gen 5:12, his great, great grandson was Jared, and his great, great, great grandson was Enoch, Gen 5:18. Enoch had a son, the great, great, great, great grandson of Seth, and his name was Methuselah, Gen 5:21. Methuselah is usually singled out because he was blessed to be the oldest human who ever lived at 969 years, Gen 5:27. Methuselah had a son, named Lamech, who was the great, great, great, great, great grandson of Seth. Lamech had a son named Noah, who was the great, great, great, great, great, great grandson of Seth.

Genesis 5:1-9:28 demonstrates how obedience precedes blessing, and blessing produces blessings. Seth was God's replacement for the loss of Abel. Because of the spiritual leadership of Seth and his son Enosh, men began to call on the name of Yahweh. They began to worship the Lord God, who was the creator of heaven and earth, Gen 1:1. So from Seth to Enosh to Cainan to Mahalalel to Jared and to Enoch came a godly heritage, so Enoch "walked with God," Gen 5:22, 24a, meaning that he

had a life of obedient service so that God took Enoch home with Him, *Gen 5:24b*. Enoch was taken by the Lord, but his son Methuselah was blessed with long life to compensate for the early loss of his godly father, Enoch, *Gen 5:27*. Methuselah had a son, Lamech, whose son was named Noah. Look at what Lamech said at the birth of Noah, "This one will comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord [Yahweh] has cursed," *Gen 5:29*.

"Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord [Yahweh]," *Gen 6:8*, and was a "just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God," *Gen 6:9*. He trusted God to build the ark, he trusted God to get him through the flood, and to him God gave the promise of blessing in which every person who has ever lived after him has participated, *Gen 8:22*. *Genesis 9:1* says, "So God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth,'" *Gen 9:1*, cf. *1:28*. God also made a covenant with Noah known as the Noachide covenant in which He promised never again to destroy the earth by flood, *Gen 9:11*. This passage in *Genesis 5:1-9:28* graphically illustrates the principle that blessing follows obedience, generation after generation, and blessing creates blessings and challenges believers to commitment for faithful obedience. It is a wonderful spiritual roadmap of ordinary people who became extraordinary in learning how to "walk."

I. Walk in Faithfulness

In *Ephesians*, Paul is writing to encourage the believers about their "walk" with Christ. He wanted them and us to understand that the new inheritance and new nature of a believer should reflect a new level of moral and spiritual conduct. Our new life in Christ means we are to walk in God's will, wisdom, righteousness, and love. As transformed believers, we are to "walk" with Christ who is our life, see *John 3:36; 5:26-29; Col 3:4; 1 John 5:12; Rev 2:7*. It is the Spirit of Christ working in us to produce life and to enable us to share the words of life, *Rom 8:6; 2 Cor 3:6; 2 Pet 3:18; Rev 11:11*.

The church in Ephesus was in a pagan culture, and Paul was writing to remind them that in that culture they were no longer to behave like the rest of the citizens of Ephesus. The city was a notorious international trade center, a notorious international sports center of the Panionian Games, a notorious religious center for the worship of the goddess Diana, a notorious political center as an assize city, which was the center of government and the courts, and it was a notoriously wicked city of prostitution and homosexual activity. One Roman historian said of Ephesus, "It is the darkness of vileness, morals lower than animals, inhabitants fit only to be drowned." The church was located in a city that was at the center of a spiritually sick, oppressive, and debauched world, a location that challenged the young church. It was very much like living in the world we now live in. So, the Apostle Paul's

message was don't walk like the world, 4:17! It is no surprise that Paul presents four hallmarks of the world's walk that the Ephesians should avoid.

II. How Not to Walk - The Way of the World

Paul begins with the negative instruction of do not "walk" in the ways of the world. He is warning up front not to live like the world. Holiness is godliness, and it is antithetical to how the world lives. Don't think, act, talk, or walk like the world. So he begins his admonition that the Ephesians "should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk," 4:17. Then he proceeds to explain how the world walks.

1. **The World's Walk Is Vain and Self-centered, 4:17** - Don't walk like the world! The world walks in the vanity of its own opinions, devices, selfishness, and futile, pointless, and purposeless ways. Worldly people make their own decisions based on personal preference and personal bias. Romans 1:18-32 is a commentary on Ephesians 4:17-19, especially Romans 1:21, "because although they know God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts [wills] were darkened."
2. **The World's Walk Is Willfully Ignorant, 4:18** - The "darkened understanding" is because of the willful choice to be alienated from God, Rom 1:21. Such blindness of the truth results in a blind and hardened will. The word for blindness is the Greek *porosis*, which literally means "hardness," see 2 Cor 4:3-4. If one comes to the end of life and still refuses the grace of God's salvation, then there is no hope, Rev 22:11.
3. **The World's Walk Is Shameless, 4:19a** - Shame is a characteristic of life for the way the worldly person thinks, talks, and walks. There is no guilt, no remorse, no conviction about right or wrong, and no sense of rebellion against God. Worldliness produces insensitivity to the needs of others. This is the reason why the world can abort infants in the womb without remorse. The world's walk turns away from everything that is good and godly, and it does so without shame and with a proud arrogance of personal and public defiance, see Jude 7-11. The worldly person is spiritually dead, darkened, depraved, and degenerate.
4. **The World's Walk Is Sinful, 4:19b** - The last part of verse 19 presents a picture of those who go after sin enthusiastically, given over to all the lewdness, insensitivity to the things of God, uncleanness, greed, lasciviousness, perversion, no self control, and total abandon to the lusts of the flesh. Note the statement in 19a that they are "past feeling." The Greek word is *apalgeo*, a rare word that can mean "despondent," "callous," "insensitive," hence "without feeling." This is a person who has no compassion on a fellow human being. It is a person with a hardened will against God and others, resulting in a moral apathy. Grammatically, it is a perfect active participle, which means that the attitude of such a person is constant and unyielding, Rom 1:24, 26, 28.

III. How to Walk – The Way of Christ

Notice the contrast in the four elements above as compared with the godly and Christ-centered walk of the Word.

- 1. Walk in the Footsteps of Jesus, 4:20 [instead of the way of the world]**

This walk is the Christ-centered walk of a life that rejects self-interests and self-centeredness and is characterized by grace and obedience. It leads to a maturity that results in a single commitment around which everything else in our life revolves. It is the characteristic found in the life of Noah, who is called "perfect in his generations," Gen 6:9. It is the "blameless" life exhibited in Job for which God commended him, see Job 1:8 as "blameless," and twice in Job 2:8 as "blameless" and as "integrity." The word found in these three verses is the Hebrew *tam*, which refers to a person who has a single concentric point in their life around which everything else revolves. It is only possible to live such a life when we receive the grace of God and purpose in our heart to walk in obedience with Him, see Titus 2:11-15, Ps 1:1-3.
- 2. Walk in the Truth, 4:21 [instead of spiritual ignorance]**

Walking in truth is walking in obedience to the Word of God just as David admonished Solomon, 1 Kgs 2:1-4. In his final charge to Israel, Moses reminded them that the God they served is a God of truth, see Deut 32:1-4. The Hebrew word for truth is *amen* and *ameth*, which means something that is unchanging and accurate, exact, right, and morally correct. In the New Testament the Greek word *alethia* essentially means the same as the Hebrew. Similarly, walking with Jesus is to walk in the truth of his Word because He is the "way," the "truth," and the "life," and the only way to God, see John 14:6. Jesus presents an inseparable link between knowing the Word, obeying the Word, and walking in the truth, see John 8:31-36.
- 3. Walk in Purity, 4:22 [instead of shameless perversions]**

Purity involves putting off or ceasing "your former conduct," such as the moral impurities described in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, which is followed by a discourse on bringing glory to God in one's spirit and body, 1 Cor 6:12-20. Purity and holiness are characteristics of God's nature, and we are commanded to emulate godly purity, Lev 11:44-45; 1 Tim 4:12. In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, He admonishes all believers to maintain a "pure" heart and promises His blessing to the "pure in heart," see also Ps 73:1; Phil 4:8; 1 Tim 3:8-9; 5:22; 2 Tim 1:3; Jas 1:27; 1 John 3:3.
- 4. Walk with a Regenerate Mind, 4:23-24 [instead of unrelenting sinfulness]**

One of the reasons that the Gospel is good news lies in the transformation that occurs in the life of a believer when a life is changed by Christ's presence and power. Paul stated it eloquently in Romans 12:2, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind,

that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." The natural or unregenerate person has no concern for spiritual things, 1 Cor 2:6-16, because there is no spiritual life, thought, wisdom, or discernment. When individuals turn to Christ, their life is completely transformed.

Again the Scripture says, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he or she is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new," 2 Cor 5:17. This transformation is described as "putting on" the new person you are in Christ. It is like taking off your old clothing and putting on new clean, fresh, and beautiful garments, 4:24. Paul speaks in Rom 6:6-16 of this transformation as the crucifixion of the "old man," and the resurrection of the new person that emerges in Christ. In Colossians 3:1-17, we also have a commentary on the marvelous transformation that occurs when individuals receive Jesus as their Savior.

Conclusion

The wonderful Old Testament analogy of "walking" as a description of how we conduct our lives is explored clearly in this wonderful passage. It describes four things that we must avoid in learning how to walk, and four things we must embrace in our learning how to walk with Christ in our life. This theme does not end here, but after an interlude that discusses "learning what to wear" in 4:25-32, Paul will return for the second part of his discussion on "Learning How to Walk, Part 2."