

Living the New Life

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Date: 29 September 2013

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[0 : 0 0] Well, often in life, it's important not just to achieve something, but to maintain it as well. So take, for example, losing weight.

There's no point achieving your ideal weight, weeks and weeks of strict calorie control, giving up chocolate and cake, grueling exercise, only to then put it all back again.

Or if you're trying to quit smoking or coffee, to have all those withdrawal symptoms, finally kicking the habit, and then go back to the habit again.

It's just a waste. Well, the same goes for the Christian life. There's no point in becoming a Christian if you don't intend to stay as one.

That is, what is the point of asking God to forgive you for your sins, to have this new life, and then to go back to those very sins that you were forgiven. Well, tonight, that's our focus.

[1 : 0 4] We want to try and work through this passage, which talks about what it means to walk the new life as Christians. That's Paul's main concern in this passage, and we're going to look at it.

Now, this idea of walking has actually been a constant theme in this letter to the Ephesians. The English translations, particularly the NIV, does not always use this word walk.

But in the original language, in Greek, Paul uses the word walk many times in this letter, and it is to describe the person's way of life. It's an idea that he's taken from the Old Testament, describing someone's direction in life.

So, if you were with us, you might remember in Ephesians chapter 2, at the start, Paul said to the Ephesians that they used to walk dead in their sins, and following the ruler of the kingdom of the air.

That was in verse 1. Then, after that, God saved them and raised them up with Christ. And then, in verse 10, Paul then says that God has now prepared good works in advance for them to do.

[2 : 0 7] Now, the word to do, in Greek, literally is prepared for them to walk in. And then, at the start of chapter 4, last week, you might have looked at, Paul urges them to live a life worthy of the calling they have received.

Well, the literal translation there is, Paul urges them to walk worthy of the calling to which they were called. And so, here in our passage tonight, Paul resumes this idea of walking that he left off in verse 1.

He wants them to walk this life of calling with God. And so, three times in this passage, Paul uses the word walk. Verse 17, don't live or don't walk as the Gentiles do.

Then, in chapter 5 and verse 2, walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us. And then, finally, in verse 8, live or walk as children of light.

So, the idea of walking as a Christian runs through this entire passage. And the question we want to ask is, what does it look like? How do we walk as Christians?

[3 : 13] Well, I'm going to break up the passage into three sections according to these three instances of walking. So, in verse 17 to 24 of chapter 4, Paul calls us to walk being mindful of Christ or having a mind full of Christ.

Then, the second section in chapter 4 and 25 to 5, chapter 5 and verse 2, Paul calls us to walk in love like Christ. So, that's our second section. And then, finally, in verses 3 to 14 of chapter 5, Paul calls us to walk as light for Christ.

Now, all through this passage, Paul's tone is one of urging and pleading. Because there was a danger of having become a Christian, not staying as one.

Of being tempted to go back to their old way of living. And so, Paul, in this first section, urges them to put off their old self and put on their new self.

And Paul describes the old self in the first three verses, in 17 to 19. And so, he says, See, as the Gentiles do in the futility of their thinking.

[4 : 23] See, as Gentiles, they were given over to sensuality.

That is, their life was based on all about following their desires. Giving in to their base instincts. And satisfying the cravings of their flesh.

Things like money, power and sex. Greed and lust. And why is that? Well, because of their darkened understanding and futile minds.

For whatever reason, they had hardened their hearts to God and rejected Him. And so, without this relationship with God, they're separated from the life of God. And so, therefore, they no longer have any moral compass to guide them.

And so, the only things that determine their choices are the desires of their flesh. Now, we see that today, don't we? Just ask yourself, as you look around, what motivates people in life?

[5 : 37] Whether it's at work or with your neighbors. And in the main, we have to say it's people's desires. Often, selfish desires. To get ahead in life.

To enjoy the things of life. Money, power and sex. These are the commodities that people still trade in. So, those with power, we often see, will trade it for sex.

Those with money, use it to gain power. And then, we've heard of instances, for example, of people sleeping around at work to get ahead in the company. But Paul says that that's no longer how the Ephesians are to live.

And that's no longer how we are to live. For we are no longer ruled by our base instincts. But rather, by the renewal of our minds. Minds which have learned Christ and transformed, have been transformed by the truth that is Jesus.

So, Paul continues in verse 20. That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ. And were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.

[6 : 43] You were taught with regard to your former way of life. To put off your old self. That was in verse 17 to 19. Which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires. And to be made new in the attitude of your minds.

And to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. So, can you see the difference then between the old and the new self?

The old is corrupted by deceitful desires. By the lie that life is all about satisfying those desires. But the new is made new in the attitude of the mind.

Because it has learned Christ. It has, not only in the head, but in the whole life, embraced Jesus as their Savior and Lord. And so they understand how that has totally changed them.

As Paul says, they are now a new creation. And it's amazing, isn't it? Because they are created to be like God. In true righteousness and holiness. With the old self, the mind is futile.

[7 : 46] So, desires drive choices and actions. But with the new self, because the mind is constantly renewed by the life of God. It's the mind that determines the way we live.

A mind that is full of Christ. Which then helps us to choose righteousness and holiness. That is able to help us keep our desires in check. See, when desires are actually under the control of a mind full of Christ, it's not a bad thing.

But when they control our lives, the desires that is, then they corrupt us and they deceive us. Telling us that that is all life is about. And so the first key aspect to walking the new life is to constantly remind ourselves about Jesus.

Fill our minds with the truth that is Jesus. So that then we can walk and work out our lives in a righteous and holy way. Which is now what Paul turns to in the second section.

Because there he describes what a righteous and holy life looks like. It is one where we walk in love like Christ. So we've already seen in verse 24, Paul says that we are created to be like God.

[9 : 02] And now here in these verses 25 to 32, Paul gives us three examples, specifically, of what this looks like. Now, a righteous life is more than just these three things, of course.

But it's probably a very good place to start. And the three things are, in our speech, one, with anger management, two. And then with our work ethic.

Let's look at each one of them briefly. So beginning with verse 25. Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood. So the word put off again is there, indicating that falsehood is part of the old self.

And speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. And then later in verse 29, Paul adds this. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs.

That is, that it may benefit those who listen. So just like God, our speech is to help others, to build them up, and to benefit those who listen.

[10 : 07] Our words are powerful, aren't they? I mean, if you don't believe me, just look at all the cyberbullying that's happening on the Internet. And the damage that causes. With, you know, sadly, some teenagers even taking their own lives.

But if you think about it, none of that is physical, is it? They're all just words. Yes. And yet, it has the capacity to do such damage. And that's the same with us.

Conversely, imagine what good we can do when we use words for good. Just like God's own word. Last week in verse 15, you would have seen that God makes the body mature.

How? When each part speaks the truth in love. Well, it's the same here. God uses our words to build each other up. Now, I don't think Paul's just saying that all we do is talk niceties to each other.

Sometimes when we speak the truth, we need to do that perhaps to correct and to rebuke. But even then, we need to do that in love. Not because we want to somehow get our anger off our chest.

[11 : 16] We need to do it because it will benefit the other person. It will build others up. So, that's speech. The same goes with anger management. So, Paul goes on to say in verse 26, In your anger, do not sin.

Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry. And do not give the devil a foothold. Later in verse 31, Paul adds, Get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger, brawling, and slander, along with every form of malice.

You see, it is possible to be angry without sinning. That's clear from these verses. But it is also very easy for anger to turn into sin. When does anger turn into sin?

I think Paul is saying when we let the sun go down in our anger. When we turn it into bitterness and rage and slander and malice. Now, I know sometimes it's not possible to stop your anger before the sun goes down.

Those of us who are husbands and wives know what it feels like to have an argument just before bedtime, when the sun has already gone down. So, I don't think we need to apply this literally.

[12 : 22] Otherwise, you know, we'll get more time to be angry over summer because of daylight saving time than winter. But the principle is, I think, that we mustn't let anger go unresolved.

Don't let it fester and stew. Don't nurse a grudge. In other words, don't replay it over and over again in your mind. Because when you do that, then it turns into bitterness and rage and slander and malice.

It will eat at us. And then it will want to make us get even with the other person. Which is all very old self, isn't it? Because we're letting our emotions and our desires drive our behavior.

It's selfish and other-centered. And then Paul says, when that happens, we give the devil a foothold. Verse 27. Or the flip side, we grieve the Holy Spirit in verse 30.

Because the Holy Spirit is trying to build the body up for the day of redemption. But instead, what we do is give the devil a way of tearing down what God is building. And, you know, sadly, this is one of the main causes of church division.

[13 : 28] And I've seen it myself twice in the same church. And it's, I have to say, one of the most successful weapons that the devil uses.

Taking a seemingly sort of small issue and then blowing up the church with it. So, friends, can I say, if ever you are ever angry or bothered about something, don't nurse a resentment over it.

Come and talk to me or one of the pastors, particularly if it's to do with the church. Don't let the devil have a foothold. But better yet, Paul goes on to say, let's be like God in verse 32.

Let's be kind and compassionate to one another. Forgiving each other just as in Christ, God forgave us. See, so much of our anger, I think, will just disappear if only we remind ourselves how much God has forgiven us.

Whatever wrong others have done to us, it's nothing compared to the wrong that we've done to God. And yet, God has forgiven us. And finally, or thirdly, in this section, Paul talks now about work ethics.

[14 : 41] So, that's verse 27. We jump back to that. Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

Now, I think Paul here is talking about able-bodied individuals. So, I don't think he's talking about the very young or the sick or the old. But the logic is, if you can steal, then you can work.

But again, the motivation is to be other-centered. The aim of work is so that you can share. Now, I know that for some of us, jobs are hard to find at the moment.

And, you know, we keep praying, and our hearts go up to you on that. But I think if you look at the verses, Paul's not limiting this just to paid work. We are to do something useful with our hands, whether we get paid or not.

And so, I say, whatever it is, it could be community or volunteer work. If we are able, then all of us should work. That's pleasing to God. And that includes work in the home, which is just as important to God.

[15 : 48] And so, the same goes, I think, for students or teenagers. You may not need to work because your parents are giving you the money to eat and survive. But always think about how you can apply these rules by being helpful to others, perhaps helping around the house or the church or in the community.

And I know a lot of us are already doing that, so good on you for that. And I think there's one word here, even for those of us who get paid to work. We need to look at the motivation for work.

The old self talks about working to satisfy our needs. It's all about our advancement, our needs, our desires. But if we are to live the new self like Jesus, then we are to work not for ourselves, but for others.

We are to be like Jesus, who worked not for himself, but for others. And so, that's why I think Paul sums this all up at the end with chapter 5 and verse 1 and 2 with the overriding principle.

He says, Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children. Be like your father, he says, and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

[17 : 06] That is, be like our father by following his son's example. Jesus did his greatest work by dying on the cross. That's what it means for him to give himself up for us.

Not for himself, but for us. And he also did it for his father because Paul goes on to say that was a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

So he did all that, gave himself up for us and for God. So walk in love by living for others just like Jesus. And now we finally get to the third section, which is when we walk in the mind with a mind full of Christ and in love like Christ, we also walk as light for Christ.

So Paul sets up another contrast here. This time it's darkness versus light, just like the old self and the new self. And again, Paul insists on a clear separation between light and darkness.

The light or the darkness, Paul describes in verses three to six. So if you look with me, but among you, there must not even be a hint of sexual immorality or of any kind of impurity of a greed because these are improper for God's holy people.

[18 : 25] Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this, you can be sure, no immoral, impure or greedy person, such a person is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things, God's wrath comes upon those who are disobedient. I wonder whether you get the sense of the force of Paul's words here.

Paul is saying, don't fool around. There must not even be a hint of sexual immorality. For you can be sure, he says, no such person will inherit the kingdom of Christ.

Let no one deceive you. Because of such things, God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Can you feel the weight of what Paul is saying?

Friends, we have a forgiving God who is generous and giving. But if you think that gives you a license to sin, to sleep around, to indulge in pornography, to share sexes or coarse jokes, to be greedy, then unfortunately you haven't read these verses carefully enough.

[19 : 37] God is holy and righteous, and so should his people. It's there in verse 3. And it's also there in the entire Old Testament passage that we read tonight in Leviticus.

We are to be holy because God, our Father, is holy. It's as simple and as black and white as that. Which means we shouldn't be going around asking, how much can I get away with?

As if to say, how close can I get to the darkness and still be light? I mean, that's the wrong question. We should be asking, how much can I do to please God? What's the maximum as an inheritor of the kingdom that I should be doing as a child of light?

And so Paul says in the next verses, Therefore do not be partners with them, for you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live or walk as children of light, for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth, and find out what pleases the Lord.

Children of light will bear the fruit of light. That's just the way it is. Goodness, righteousness, and truth. These are the things that should shine up from us, you know, like seep out or leak out.

[20 : 46] We can't keep it in. And then Paul goes on to say further that not only do we not practice darkness, we're not to partner with darkness. So verse 11, have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.

It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. So I'm not going to talk much about it because Paul says not to mention it. But I'm sure many of you would have seen it at work or at school.

Now again, I don't think Paul is saying you shouldn't be relating to these people. I think it's the deeds that we are not to have any association with. But if we begin to partner with them in these deeds, you know, for example, if we play along when people tell coarse jokes and laugh at them even though we're not telling them, or we slag off on a colleague, or, you know, when others do it and we don't sort of rejoin in by just nodding or affirming, then we are sort of in a sense partnering with them, approving of what they're doing.

Now I know that having worked in the workplace that standing up like that takes courage, but that's what Paul would like us to do because we are exposing, when we do that, take a stand, we are exposing those deeds as darkness.

And I'm afraid that when we do that, sometimes people accuse us of being, you know, goody two shoes and they will hate us for it. But that is precisely what light does.

[22 : 20] Light exposes darkness and the deeds done in darkness. So I think that's what verse 13 means, that everything exposed by light becomes visible.

It is shown for what it is. And unfortunately, people will hate us for it. But that is also how people will become children of light as well.

And so I think when Paul goes on to say that everything that is illuminated becomes a light, we can take that in two ways. Firstly, we can say that when Christ first shone on you, that's in verse 14, we awoke from death, we became light ourselves, shining for Jesus.

So that's one way of thinking. But secondly, I think when Christ shines on others, through us, through our deeds, then they too become transformed by God and they become light.

So yes, some people will hate us for walking as light, but others will thank us for it because they too then will awake and rise from the dead as a result of seeing the light in us.

[23 : 27] well, we've come to the end of our passage, but I want to just conclude by making one observation. And some of you may have already picked up that there is a tension throughout this passage because on the one hand, Paul is saying we're already in the light, we've got our new self, yet on the other hand, Paul keeps saying keep putting off the old self, don't walk in the darkness, don't do these things because you might come under God's wrath.

So why is this happening? Why is Paul saying that we are the new self and yet continue to put off the old self? Well, I think that's the tension that we have in the Christian life, but it's not a contradiction because the way to tell that if we are children of light is whether we keep walking as children of light.

Yes, we are saved by faith only in Jesus, but our deeds show whether that faith is genuine, whether we truly trust in Jesus for our forgiveness. Friends, I've had great joy in baptizing some of you this year and last.

That's a great occasion. But what will give me greater joy is to be turning up at your funeral. Although for most of you I won't be alive then, but if I were there and all of us will get there, to then hear others say of your life that you have walked the new life.

That is, you have lived out your baptism not just at the start but until the very end because that is what God has created us to do. Let's pray.

[25 : 04] Let's pray. Father, you are holy and in one sense we don't even get or sense how holy that is.

and yet we see in your son Jesus what that looks like, what righteousness and truth and goodness looks like. And so we ask that Lord you might continue to fill our minds with Christ our Savior each and every day studying, reflecting, working out what he has done and what that means for us to follow in his footsteps.

Renew our minds in Christ help us to walk in love like Christ so that we might shine as light for Christ. In all this we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.