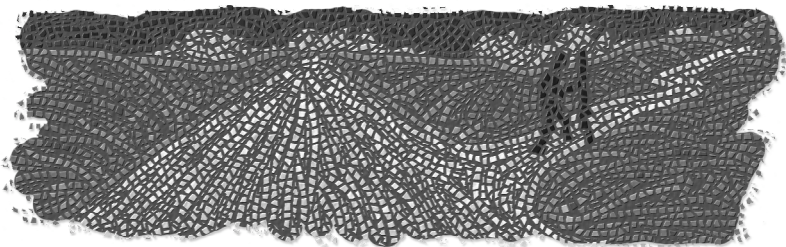


The Christian Walk



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exodus 20; Isa. 5:20; John 15:10; Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:18; Eph. 5:1-21; 1 John 5:2, 3; 2 John 1:6.*

Memory Text: “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light” (*Ephesians 5:8, NIV*).

Paul continues his exhortations on a life that will be “worthy of the calling” (*Eph. 4:1, NIV*) by telling us to undertake the Christian walk in all seriousness (*Eph. 5:1-21*). One doesn't have to read very far in Paul before one can see just how seriously Paul takes the Christian walk. Paul knows nothing about cheap grace. Though we are saved by what Christ has done for us, we must live in response to the salvation we have been given in Jesus. We have a new life; we now have to live that new life as God commands.

In the texts for this week, Paul provides five contextual reasons for such a walk: love, judgment, light, wisdom, and fullness of the Holy Spirit. Though devoting only a few words to each, Paul, nevertheless, clearly sets out what is expected of those who once walked in darkness but now are in the light.

The Week at a Glance: What does walking in love mean? How stern a warning did Paul give regarding the judgment upon unrepentant sinners? What does it mean to walk in light as opposed in darkness? What is the difference between walking wisely and walking foolishly?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 3.*

Walk in Love

“Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And 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” (Eph. 5:1, 2, NKJV).

Believers are called to be imitators of God. God in Christ is our model in everything—in ethics, in suffering, in obedience, in work, in prayer, and, above all, in love. So, we are admonished to “walk in love.”

At least three principles emerge from the words of this text.

First, Christ’s love is selfless. It is *agape* love: a love that is based on principle, not on emotion; an outgoing love that centers on meeting the needs of others even though they are undeserving of it. God’s love is such that He demonstrated “His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (*Rom. 5:8, NKJV*). To walk in love is to love the unlovable.

Think about someone unlovable. What tangible things can you do to start showing this person love? Why not commit now to doing it?

Second, Christ’s love is sacrificial. Christ is the supreme example of sacrifice. He bore the cross of shame and gave up His life in order that humanity might be redeemed (*2 Cor. 5:21*). To walk in love is to abandon self in order to minister to others. “Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ, and it is therefore not at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer.”—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), p. 101.

When was the last time you actually suffered in behalf of someone else? What does your answer tell you about yourself and the changes you need to make?

Third, Christ’s love is reconciling. Christ reconciled all broken relationships and brought complete unity (*Rom. 5:10, 2 Cor. 5:18*). To walk in Christ’s love is to be ministers of His reconciliation.

In what ways have you seen the power of love bring reconciliation? Think of an example you can share with the class.

Walk in View of Judgment *(Eph. 5:3-7)*

Read Ephesians 5:3-7 and then answer the following questions:

- **What are the specific sins Paul warns about?**
- **In what ways are all these sins violations of the Ten Commandments** *(see Exodus 20)*?
- **Notice how Paul contrasts these sins with his admonition to “walk in love”** *(Eph. 5:2)*. **Why are these sins the opposite of walking in love?** *See also Neh. 1:5; Dan. 9:4; John 15:10; 1 John 5:2, 3; 2 John 1:6.*
- **Look at the warning Paul gives in Ephesians 5:6. Given the context, what do you think those “vain words” were about?** *See also 1 John 3:7.*

One of the great tragedies of life is to live as though God does not exist or that it doesn't matter if He does or not. Such an attitude fosters a life that is restricted to the present with no thought for the future. But the biblical view of life projects that history is moving toward an ultimate point when all humankind shall be held accountable before God's judgment *(2 Cor. 5:10, Heb. 9:27)*. Final accountability to God is inescapable, and Paul warns that as surely as the love of God appeared for the salvation of humanity, so surely “the wrath of God” will appear “upon the sons of disobedience” *(Eph. 5:6, NKJV)*. The divine wrath is divine judgment against evil and its children. Because of this certainty of judgment, Paul appealed to the believers, “Do not be partakers with them” *(vs. 7, NKJV)*. With whom? Verse 6 speaks of those “with empty words.” These were false teachers still clinging to their pagan philosophy, denying the reality of sin and a final judgment for that sin. No wonder Paul warns them to stay away from such people and their philosophy, for they go counter to the truth as it is in Jesus. Paul expresses horror at these false teachings and calls those responsible as “sons of disobedience” upon whom will fall “the wrath of God” *(vs. 6, NKJV)*. As far as Christians are concerned, the apostle pleads that among them there should not be even a hint, a thought, or a joke concerning such sins.

If you look at the kind of sins that will bring judgment, Paul said nothing about adultery or murder, the more “serious” sins. Instead, he talks about such things as jesting and covetousness. What should this tell us about the nature of even these sins?

Walk in Light (*Eph. 5:8-14*)

“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light” (*Eph. 5:8, NKJV*).

Having defined the Christian life as walking in love, with a view of the impending judgment, Paul now turns to a third aspect: walking as children of light. In keeping with his style, he provides another contrast: Once you were children of darkness, now you are children of light (*Eph. 5:8*).

While darkness represents the old life, light stands for the new. The apostle recognizes that believers have moved from darkness to light (*vs. 8*). Since conversion they have become light in the Lord; that is, reflectors of the character of the One who said “ ‘I am the light of the world’ ” (*John 8:12*).

Oftentimes we tend to equate “light” with intellectual knowledge, knowledge of facts, and “darkness” as ignorance of facts. And though there’s some truth to this idea, read over Ephesians 5:8-14 and answer this question: What does Paul equate walking in the light with? More specifically, is it dealing only with head knowledge or with the moral life and the conduct of a Christian? Why is this answer important?

Notice, too, Paul is so firm about living a life free from moral taint that he not only admonishes us to stay away from those who do evil but he also calls upon us to reprove them.

Read carefully Ephesians 5:13. How does that help us understand how we might reprove evil without having to open our mouths? See *John 3:20*.

Have you ever known anyone whose lifestyle, demeanor, and character acted as light that reproved your darkness? How did you respond? Did you accept the silent reproof with humility and repentance, or did you flee the light or even fight against it by, perhaps, calling it darkness? See *Isa. 5:20*.

Walk in Wisdom *(Eph. 5:15-17)*

Our Christian walk, Paul has told us, must be different from that of the world. We ought to walk according to love. We must be mindful of the judgment to come in all we do. We should take care that we walk in light. Now Paul adds another dimension: walk with wisdom.

The Bible talks a lot about wisdom. In the following verses, what kind of wisdom is being talked about? 1 Cor. 1:20, 21; 3:19; 2 Cor. 1:12. What are examples of this kind of wisdom?

In contrast to this kind of wisdom, Paul, in these verses, talks about a different kind of wisdom, a different kind of knowledge. As seen earlier, this kind of knowledge isn't mere head knowledge, a knowledge of facts, however useful and helpful and "good" those facts could be. Instead, the whole context here places knowledge in the context of what we do. The wise do correctly, the ignorant do foolishly, regardless of how much intellectual knowledge either one has.

How does Paul in Ephesians 5:17 describe what it means to be "unwise"? How do these following verses help answer that question? Ps. 111:10, Prov. 1:7, Isa. 33:6.

The world exists only because of God; everything that exists does so only through the will of God. It's no wonder, then, that knowledge would consist in knowing the will of God, at least as much as we are able. Though there is much about God and His will we cannot know, we can know that His will for us is that we live pure, holy lives, lives that reflect His love and His character. This is true wisdom. Thus, some of the "smartest" people in the world live in the grossest ignorance and darkness.

Ephesians 5:15 tells us to walk "carefully" (*RSV*) so we are not "fools" (*vs. 17, NEB*) but wise. What practical things can we do that will help us not to be "fools"?

Walk With the Fullness of the Spirit

(Eph. 5:18-20)

To the four elements of the Christian walk, Paul adds the final and, perhaps, the most operative element: “Be filled with the Spirit” (*Eph. 5:18*). Believers filled with the Holy Spirit will have His empowerment to walk the Christian way in love, in light, in wisdom, and in the sense of the coming judgment. Enlightenment and empowerment are two of the great blessings that come from the indwelling Spirit.

Read Ephesians 5:18. Why do you think Paul used the example of alcohol there? What point is he making? *See also Rom. 6:16.*

Though Paul is using alcohol in his example, he could really be talking about anything that comes between the believer and the power of the Holy Spirit. In other words, we should let nothing control us over and beyond the influence of the Holy Spirit. Paul is making a profound theological statement that is fundamental to the experience of the new birth and sanctification that come as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit. The question every Christian needs to ask is, “Under whose control is my body, mind, and spirit functioning? Is it under the control of alcohol or greed or lust or covetousness or anything else that can hinder my walk with God? Or is it under the control of the Holy Spirit?” The Spirit is what guides in the path we should go; if anything else controls us, we will surely be led astray.

If we are to be “filled” with the Spirit, how much room exists for anything else?

After telling them to be “filled with the Spirit,” what does Paul then tell them to do? *See Eph. 5:19-21.* How are all these things related?

If someone were to ask you, “Have you received the Holy Spirit?” what would your answer be? What would you present as evidence of your having received the fullness of the Spirit?

Further Study: *Walking in love.* “All who are imbued with His Spirit will love as He loved. The very principle that actuated Christ will actuate them in all their dealing one with another.

“This love is the evidence of their discipleship. ‘By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples,’ said Jesus, ‘if ye have love one to another.’ When men are bound together, not by force or self-interest, but by love, they show the working of an influence that is above every human influence. Where this oneness exists, it is evidence that the image of God is being restored in humanity, that a new principle of life has been implanted.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 678.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Based on Sunday’s lesson, share, as a class, examples of the power of love bringing reconciliation between either groups or individuals who were previously in contention. What lessons can we learn from these examples for ourselves?
- 2 “Let no one deceive you with empty words”—that is, false teachings (*Eph. 5:6, NKJV*). What are some of the false teachings currently disturbing the Christian faith, and how would you handle them?
- 3 Discuss the question of what “holiness” is. Is it more than a mere adherence to the law? Can you be a strict follower of the law and still not be holy?
- 4 As a class, take time together to do what Paul tells believers in Ephesians 5:19, 20 to do. Sing some songs and have people give testimonies of thankfulness to God. When done, ask “What benefits do we get, as believers, by praising God and openly giving thanks? Why should we make a habit of doing this?”
- 5 Discuss the difference between worldly wisdom and godly wisdom (see Wednesday’s lesson). Are they necessarily in contradiction with each other? Can worldly wisdom ever help us better understand godly wisdom? If so, in what way?

A Sacrifice of Love

by SETRA RATSIMBA

Setra is a teenager living in Madagascar. When he was little, his father took him and his five brothers and sisters to church every Sabbath. Setra's mother was not an Adventist. When Setra was seven, his father died, and no one took the children to church. The family struggled to survive on the little money his mother could earn sewing for the neighbors.

A few years later Setra's neighbors invited the children to attend Sabbath School again. Once more Setra and his brothers and sisters walked one hour to Sabbath School on Sabbath. When he was old enough, Setra joined the baptismal class and was baptized. One by one his siblings stopped attending the church, leaving Setra to worship alone.

On Sabbath everyone got up early. Setra went to Sabbath School, and his brothers and sisters went to the fields to work. Often he remained at the church until sundown so he could attend all the meetings and not be under the influence of secular music or talking.

On Sunday while the other members of the family rested, Setra gathered wood to sell in the marketplace. Then, because his mother was getting too old to work, Setra washed the family's clothes at the river. Sometimes he was tempted to grumble that he had to do women's work, but he decided to make scrubbing his family's clothes his sacrifice of love. Alone at the riverside, Setra sang praises to God as he dipped the clothes into the river, sprinkled soap powder on them, then scrubbed them by hand. He prayed as he rinsed each piece and wrung it dry. Then he sang as he carried the laundry home and laid it on the grass to dry.

Setra does not mind working on Sunday. He is grateful that his brothers and sisters allow him to worship God on Sabbath. Setra asks that the worldwide church pray that he will remain faithful in Jesus and that his family will turn their lives over to God.



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