

How We Walk...

The focus of this study is to look at what a Christian should be; what being a Christian looks like. In the New Testament, one of the ways in which this idea is conveyed is through the imagery of *walking*. Various authors address this idea, which depicts the way we behave ourselves as the people of God. There are several passages we can consider, the first being that from which the title of this study is drawn:

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:1–3).

Paul’s encouragement to the Ephesian brethren was that they would “walk worthy of the calling with which” they had been called. There was, in other words, a certain expectation that God had for them. When they responded to the calling of God, He then expected that they would behave themselves in a proper, or appropriate, manner. We will spend some time examining what is meant by this phrase in more detail in a moment, but for the present, we want to briefly consider the fact that it is God, and only God, who gets to define what is “worthy.” He is the one, who through His word has revealed His mind, who defines what is acceptable to Him. It is a common misconception today that we, as the creation, have some say in what designates a “worthy walk.”

Before we consider this passage in a bit more depth, let’s first introduce a few other passages that convey this idea of “walking”:

For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light (Colossians 1:9–12).

You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory (1 Thessalonians 2:10–12).

This word “walk” is defined as:

41.11 περιπατέω; πορεύομαι: to live or behave in a customary manner, with possible focus upon continuity of action—‘to live, to behave, to go about doing.’¹

The focus of this word is placed on actions. The way one “walks” is shown in the way that he lives his life. One cannot claim that he is “walking worthy of the Lord” and continue to live as if he is still in darkness.

To help us to understand these passages, we can look at how the idea of “walking” is used to

¹ Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* 1996 : 504. Print.

convey this spiritual message in the New Testament. This is a prevalent idea which is expressed by multiple writers. We will only consider a few to help us understand the point that Paul is making in our context above.

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Romans 6:1–4).

In Paul's instructions, he made it clear that conversion to Christ meant that we should adopt a new "walk." This imagery reflects that we have a particular way of living our lives, a "new normal" so to speak. Other New Testament imagery illustrates the idea of a "path" or "road" on which we can travel. Consider Jesus' teaching:

"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it (Matthew 7:13–14).

There are only two options: the broad way or the narrow. The narrow way is harder; it is filled with more challenges. The broad way is easy. You can get on it and stay on it with no effort at all! Notice that the idea conveyed by Jesus is that you are walking a particular path: the broad or the narrow. This designates your typical manner of life. John wrote quite extensively about this idea:

This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us (1 John 1:5–8).

Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked (1 John 2:3–6).

He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes (1 John 2:10–11).

I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, as we received a commandment from the Father. And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another. This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it (2 John 4–6).

For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth (3 John 3–4).

While we will discuss some of the specifics of John's writings in future lessons, for now notice that John emphasized the difference between walking two different paths: the path of darkness and the path of light. One has to choose which path he wants to be on; he cannot be on both!

Identifying our walk does not indicate that we are somehow perfect. Walking in light does not mean that we will never sin, that we will never stumble. But, it does indicate that we have a typical manner of life. There is a way that we choose to walk! Our walk will be shown by our actions. When we

stumble, how do we respond to it? When we fail, are we content to remain in failure? As we progress with this study, we will spend a significant amount of time examining what God has said He expects of His people. We will be looking at what this “walk” should look like. We will consider some of the specific things God requires of His people. We will also look at what types of things are *not* on the path we are supposed to be walking. What we should avoid doing is just as significant as what we should be participating in.

The main focus of this study, moving forward, will be to look at what our walk should be. What is our path? How do we get on it, and how do we stay on it? What does being a Christian *really* look like? These are questions (and answers) that are not popular in the current religious environment of our world. However, they are vitally important to understanding God’s will. Our focus is to turn to the scriptures and seek to understand what the will of God is:

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord (Ephesians 5:8–10).

Once we understand what is acceptable to the Lord, it becomes our responsibility to walk in that path. We have an obligation to follow His instruction, to be obedient to His command. That defines our path. That describes for us how we should walk and what we should look like. We cannot claim to be the people of God and then reject His instructions!

Walk worthy...

In our original context, Paul encouraged his audience to “walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.” The idea of *worthiness* is a difficult one. Part of the trouble is that the word has come to mean something different in our vernacular than what it meant when originally translated into the English language. According to *Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary*, the word “worthy” means:

1a. Having worth or value: Estimable. 1b. Honorable, meritorious. 2. Having sufficient worth or importance.²

This idea is often what we think of when we think of the word worthy as used in scripture. If we are “worthy” then we must have some inherent value, separate from what God has provided for us. It makes it sound as if we earn something because of our intrinsic value. That, however, is not what the word translated as “worthy” in the New Testament means. The word translated as “worthy” is ἀξιῶς (axios). it means:

66.6 ἀξιοῦσθ, α, ον; ἀξίωσθ: pertaining to being fitting or proper in corresponding to what should be expected—‘proper, properly, fitting, worthy of, correspond to.

ἀξίωσθ: ἀξίως περιπατῆσαι τῆς κλήσεως ἧς ἐκλήθητε ‘live a life that corresponds to the standard (God) set when he called you’ Eph 4:1.³

The idea of this word was not to say that one had to already have some innate standard to be able to serve the Lord, but rather that he had to choose to live according to the Lord’s standard! Paul was telling the Ephesian brethren that they had to choose to live in a manner that was reflective of their calling.

We will, as we continue this study, examine in more detail that which is “fitting or proper in corre-

2 “worthy.” *Merriam-Webster.com*. 2019. <https://www.merriam-webster.com> (19 July 2019).

3 Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* 1996 : 627. Print.

sponding to what should be expected.” That is, in fact, the focus of our study. We want to know, to understand, what is “fitting or proper” in our service before God. That is, we want to understand what He expects of us. He has set a standard for us, and He expects that we come to understand that standard and live by it.

Paul, in what is a similar admonition, ties together the ideas of our conduct and worthiness in his letter to the Philippian brethren:

Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God (Philippians 1:27–28).

In this passage, which seems to be a parallel idea to Ephesians 4:1, Paul makes it clear that we are expected to have a particular conduct. This idea of “conduct” is very similar to his use of the term “walk” or “walking.” It has to do with our manner of life, that which is our normal pathway. Here, he told the Philippians that they were to have a conduct that was “worthy of the gospel...” This helps to explain the last part of Paul’s instructions in our original context (Ephesians 4:1).

...of the calling with which you were called.

Many seem to think that Paul’s instructions show that each individual has his or her own “calling.” That is, God has some individual plan for every person, and when you receive your special and very individual “calling” from God, then you are expected to live up to that calling. So, if you are called to be a preacher, or a teacher, or a baker, or a singer, or an entertainer, or a football player, or anything else, then God wants you to live up to that particular calling. The problem with this thinking is that it is actually very selfish in nature. We are convinced that God wants us to be doing all the things that we really want to be doing. Many have used this idea to justify even sinful practices, claiming that God has called them to participate in these activities and has even given them special talents in that calling. But, this does not fit at all with the context of these passages!

By comparing Ephesians 4:1 with Philippians 1:27, we can see that the “calling” that Paul was talking about was that of the gospel of Christ. Notice the parallels in these two passages:

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called... (Ephesians 4:1)

Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel... (Philippians 1:27)

The terms “walk” and “conduct” are parallel, and the terms “calling” and “gospel” are parallel. The calling that Paul was discussing was the calling of the gospel, that which is given to each and every person. There is only one “calling,” not a variety of callings to every individual. Individuals must determine if they are going to heed the calling that is given to them, or not. We will discuss this idea in greater detail in the next lesson.

We can examine the context of Ephesians 4 and also see what this “calling” is that Paul references. Consider that Paul, in chapter 1, began the epistle by expressing the blessings that are available to those who are “in Christ.” He even told these brethren that he wanted to remind them of the hope that they had in His calling (Ephesians 1:18). Their hope was in Christ! They needed to know about the blessings that were “in Christ,” and how to access or attain those blessings.

In Chapter 2, Paul addressed how they received the blessing. God had rescued them from spiritual

death and brought them into spiritual life. They had “no hope” and were “without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12). But, they had been brought close to God through the blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:13). How did they come to know of the blood of Christ, that which could draw them near to God and bring them into His kingdom? They had a message of peace preached to them (Ephesians 2:17). This is the message of the gospel! This is the message that declared to them Christ and Him crucified (Ephesians 2:14-16), so that they could have their sins forgiven and be reconciled to God (Ephesians 2:18).

In Chapter 3, Paul went into greater detail about the message of the gospel that had been given to him so that he could declare it to others. He wrote about the “mystery” that had been revealed to him, which he could then reveal to all (Ephesians 3:1-7). This message declared that all who would be obedient would be a part of the Lord’s temple (Ephesians 2:22).

It is within this context that Paul declares that his audience should “walk worthy of the calling with which you were called...(Ephesians 4:1). What calling? The calling of the gospel message that he had delivered so that they could be freed from sin and become a part of God’s dwelling place; the gospel that put them “in Christ” so that they could have all the blessings that came with that.

The message of the gospel calls one out of the life that he was in and into the kingdom of God. However, being called into that kingdom comes with some clear and stringent responsibilities. Paul wrote this to the brethren in Thessalonica:

Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 4:1–8).

Paul here made it clear that they had been called for a purpose, and that was holiness. God expected that those who responded to His call, His gospel, would come out of their uncleanness and come into holiness. After all, He is holy and He expects His children to also be holy. Peter summarized this point:

Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:13–16).

Peter introduces an idea that will become a central part of our study. He declared that we are to be holy in our conduct because “He who called you is holy.” The point that Peter establishes is that we must become more like God. Our goal, our aim, should be to become more like God and more like Jesus the Christ. Paul made a similar point:

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is

the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love (Ephesians 4:11–16).

Maturing in the faith will mean we are striving to become more and more like Him. If we are failing to move in that direction (our walk) then we are not walking in light, but rather walking in darkness.

As we continue this study, we will examine more specific ways that we “walk worthy of the calling” of the Lord. We will explore how we show that we walk in holiness, and how we leave the path of darkness and walk in the path of light. It should ever be in the forefront of our minds that God wants us to walk worthy of the calling, and that should impact every step we take!

Questions...

1. What does the word “walk” mean in the context of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians? How should this word impact your actions?
2. What should direct the path that we walk?
3. What does it mean to walk in a worthy way? Does this indicate some innate “goodness”? Does it indicate moral perfection?
4. How is worthiness connected to our conduct?
5. What is the “calling” that Paul writes of in Ephesians 4? Are there different callings for different people? Why or why not?
6. If we are walking worthy of our calling, who are we seeking to be more like?
7. Does God expect us to live in holiness? Is that even possible?

