

WALK IN TRUTH,
April 10, 2016

part 2 of Walk Worthy

I used to watch the Three Stooges TV show every weeknight when growing up. It came on just before supper time. I remember one episode where the stooges knocked at the door of a big mansion. A very prim and proper butler, standing and looking very stiff answered the door. The stooges said they were repairmen and needed to speak to the owner of the house. The Butler said, "Walk this way" and very stiffly preceded them down the hallway. The stooges looked at each other, shrugged their shoulders, and very stiffly walked like the butler down the hallway.

What the butler said could be taken two different ways. When he said, "Walk this way," he meant "follow me". But the stooges interpretation was "walk like I do," and there was justification for interpreting it that way. As followers of Jesus we combine both of those interpretations. We are both following Jesus and trying to walk like Jesus.

Last week we started this series on walking. We learned that the word walk is used as a figure of speech many times in the Bible. As a figure of speech it means how we live or behave. It is used five times in this way in chapters 4 and 5 of the book of Ephesians in the Bible. Last week we looked at the first use, when we were told to...

Ephesians 4:1 (HCSB) "... walk worthy of the calling you have received,"

We have been called by God to His salvation. And in that salvation, we have received all the blessings available to those who put their faith in Jesus. He is telling us to live up to the blessings we have received. We did not earn them and do not deserve them, but we have them. We have the privilege of following Jesus, so must live up to that privilege by becoming like Jesus. We must walk like Jesus.

We looked at three positive characteristics of walking like Jesus. This week we are going to look at some negative characteristics that are very unlike Jesus. These characteristics we must not walk in. We pick up with Paul, in chapter four.

Ephesians 4:17-19 (HCSB) Therefore, I say this and testify in the Lord: You should no longer walk as the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their thoughts. They are darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them and because of the hardness of their hearts. They became callous and gave themselves over to promiscuity for the practice of every kind of impurity with a desire for more and more.

He says something very curious here. He tells us not to walk like the Gentiles do. The Gentile is a polite way of saying non-Jews. I found that curious at first because I expected him to tell us not to walk like the unbelievers. By using the word Gentile he has separated unbelievers into two groups. We have Jewish unbelievers, Jewish non-Christians, and non-Jewish unbelievers.

Now why would he do that? What is different about Jewish non-Xns and non-Jewish non-Xns? The difference is how much of the truth about God each one knew.

Look again at what he says.

Ephesians 4:18 (HCSB) "They are darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them..."

In-other-words, what they think they know about the creator is wrong. Most of them worshipped the gods of Rome or Greece. Those gods are not actually real gods. They are just stories. They do not represent reality. There is only one, true, living God, Yahweh, the creator of heaven and earth. Aside from Yahweh there is no God. He revealed Himself to mankind in the Old Testament of our Bible. He did not reveal Himself in the Vedas, the Koran, or the Book of Mormon.

Today there are thousands of religions around the world. Paul is saying that none of them are true. What they believe is not true about Yahweh, the creator of heaven and earth. Muslims worship one god, while Hindus worship thousands of gods. Both are darkened in their understanding of the truth about the creator. All other religions are darkened in their understanding of man, of sin, and what it takes to get right and stay right with God.

So why aren't the Jews darkened in their understanding? Because God had revealed Himself to the Jews. Look at what Paul writes about the blessings of the Jews in the book of Romans.

Romans 3:1-2 (HCSB) So what advantage does the Jew have?... Considerable in every way. First, they were entrusted with the spoken words of God.

Romans 9:4-5 (HCSB) ... to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the temple service, and the promises. The ancestors (Fathers) are theirs, and from them, by physical descent, came the Messiah...

So when the first Christian missionaries started preaching about salvation in Jesus, the Jews were easier to convince that Jesus was the truth. They were already expecting God to send a Messiah. And the missionaries were proving from the Old Testament prophecies that Jesus had fulfilled those prophecies.

The Gentiles did not have those prophecies before hearing about Jesus. Both the prophecies and the Gospel were new to them. Therefore, it was harder for them to hear and understand the truth that they were sinners in need of a savior, the Messiah, Jesus. Yet God convicted them in the hearts of the truth and some chose to believe.

So Paul, in Ephesians 4:17, writes for his readers not to walk like the Gentiles, in ignorance of who God is and what He is doing through Jesus.

Part of their ignorance was that they did not have the revealing of God about Himself in the Law of Moses and the prophets. They lacked revelation from God. But there was another reason for their ignorance. Go back to verse 18.

Ephesians 4:18 (HCSB) They are darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them and because of the hardness of their hearts.

They had hard hearts. Now your heart is a muscle. It is not made of wood or rock. It is made of living tissue. You can tense your arm muscle and make it kind of hard. But you can't tense your heart. He says their hearts had become hardened. He does not mean physically hardened, but hardened in a different way.

In the Bible the heart is the center of the will and spiritual receptiveness.

Your receptiveness to God depends on what it is you want. Your will is what you want. Here are some questions to ask and answer about yourself to decide what it is you want.

- How receptive am I to hearing the truth about God?
- How receptive am I to hearing the truth about my sinfulness?
- How receptive am I to hearing the truth about my need to repent of sin?
- How receptive am I to hearing the truth about obeying God?
- Do I want to obey God?
- Do I want to please God?

As a group, the gentiles, in their ignorance, had hardened their hearts to truth about God. And so they became insensitive to hearing God.

To demonstrate this, I need a volunteer. I have a bag here with some items in it. I wonder if you can identify, by feel, what they are? Just stick one hand in the bag.

Now in this second bag I have different items. I want you to try, by feel, to identify them also. But first, put this rubber glove on. Can you identify by feel what is in this bag?

Why was it more difficult the second time? You lost some of the sensitivity of your fingers because of the glove. In just that way, sinners are insensitive to certain things. They FEEL less of certain important things.

The Gentiles were insensitive to guilt and shame, for their sin.

Because of this they were getting deeper and deeper into sin, committing worse and worse sins, and getting farther and farther away from the truth of God. Their hard heartedness made it harder to learn the truth about God and develop a relationship with Him. Look what Paul contrasts that with in verse 20.

Ephesians 4:20 (HCSB) But that is not how you learned about the Messiah...

They did not learn about Jesus by hardening their hearts. How did they learn about the messiah? They learned about the Messiah by softening their hearts. The Christian missionaries brought to them the Good News of salvation in Jesus. When they heard it they listened and when the Holy Spirit convict them of its truth and they began to feel guilt and shame, they responded with godly sorrow. And then they received Jesus as their Savior and Lord. I remind you from the March 6 sermon that **Godly sorrow is sorrow over how my sin has affected God**.

Paul writes that they did not learn about the Messiah (Christ) by closing their minds and hearts to the truth. And neither did you who are Christians. You did not think to yourself, "I know all I need to know."

You did not think to yourself, "I don't want to learn anything different than what I already believe."

You did not think to yourself, "I don't want to hear that I am a sinner."

You did not think to yourself, "I don't want to learn that I need a savior."

You did not think to yourself, "I won't listen to anything that says I am a bad person."

You did not think to yourself, "I'm as good as anyone else."

Instead, admitted you are a sinner in need of Jesus. You did not close your heart to the news about sin and salvation in Jesus. You heard it, understood it, became convinced of it, and chose to become a follower of Jesus.

Now remember, Paul is writing to a mixed group. Some are Jewish Christians and some are Gentile Christians. He is writing to some who DID use to walk like Gentiles. Now he is writing for them to no longer do so.

Whereas you used to resist truth and pursue sin, now resist sin and pursue truth.

As followers of Jesus, we must do the same.

Last week he gave us some specifics about how to walk. This week he gives us some specifics about how NOT to walk. So... **What kinds of things contribute to the hardening of our hearts?**

An action that hardens your heart is telling lies.

Ephesians 4:25 (HCSB) Since you put away lying, Speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, because we are members of one another.

Now when he says, "we are members of one another" he is speaking of the church. But we must certainly apply this to our life out in the community as well.

Every lie you tell hardens your heart towards God just a little bit. And every time you resist the temptation to tell a lie, you soften your heart towards God, just a little bit. Did your heart become harder or softer towards God this week? Your actions are all the evidence you need.

An action that hardens your heart is unrestrained anger.

Ephesians 4:26-27 (HCSB) Be angry and do not sin. Don't let the sun go down on your anger, and don't give the Devil an opportunity.

Ephesians 4:31 (HCSB) All bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander must be removed from you, along with all malice.

The part about the sun going down on your anger means not to be angry for long. Don't nurse your anger. Don't water it and fertilize it so it grows. Instead, bring in to a quick end.

An action that hardens your heart is any criminal activity.

Ephesians 4:28 (HCSB) The thief must no longer steal. Instead, he must do honest work with his own hands, so that he has something to share with anyone in need.

An action that hardens your heart is misuse of your mouth.

This includes bad language, cussing, obscenity, and dirty jokes.

Ephesians 4:29 (HCSB) No foul language is to come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear.

Ephesians 5:4 (HCSB) Coarse and foolish talking or crude joking are not suitable,...

An action that hardens your heart is sexual immorality of any kind.

Ephesians 5:3 (HCSB) But sexual immorality and any impurity or greed should not even be heard of among you, as is proper for saints.

Since the 1960's introduction of the birth control pill and the cultural breakdown of sexual mores, American has become a hookup culture. The message is presented everywhere, in every form of news and entertainment. It has taken over the minds and hearts of most people in our country. Even Christians have given themselves to the lies of this culture.

There is a recent article in Time magazine that is most instructive. I have not read it, only reviews of it. It is presenting the message by young men that porn ruined them sexually. Young men are speaking out against internet pornography. These are young men who have been heavy users throughout adolescence and adulthood. Men who started viewing online porn in their teens, have become unable to have normal sexual relationships with their wives. Porn has ruined their brains for responding sexually to a real person.

God knew what He was doing when He created sex for marriage only. We ignore Him to our misery.

These are some of the activities that harden our hearts towards God. These verses speak of some positive actions too. Read Ephesians 4 and 5 this week. Ask God to open your understanding to the truth He has for you here.

Invitation:

So what is the state of your heart towards the truth of Jesus? Is your heart hard towards Him? Or is it soft?

Do you want to know Jesus? Do you want a Savior? Do you want to live right with God? Or are you resisting the truth, resisting God's will, resisting repentance from sin?

I urge you to stop resisting and start feeling. Turn your heart to God. Let yourself feel the weight of your guilt. Let yourself grieve over the consequences of your sin to God and yourself. Turn to Jesus and receive Him as your Savior and Lord.