

One day a young woman said to me, "I will go to church when Christians start acting like Christians." It is not uncommon to meet people who like Jesus but don't like Christians. There are people who admire Jesus, but not His church.

The reason people like Jesus and not His followers is because Christians, as a whole, do not act like Jesus. We tell the world how much God loves them to send a savior. We tell of the love of Jesus who died for them. But then we don't live that love towards each other or them. Christians too often fail to act like Christians are supposed to act. Christians too often fail to treat people as Jesus did. Loving people means more than being friendly and polite.

As Jesus' followers, we are to model ourselves on Jesus, the one we follow. We are to walk like Jesus. The word walk is used figuratively in the Bible for how we live, how we talk and behave towards others. We have been looking at the use of this word "walk" in Ephesians, chapters 4 and 5.

First we learned that we are to walk worthy of the calling we have received. We have been called by God into His salvation. We are to live up to having that privilege. Try to live up to the name of Christian.

Second, we are not to walk like the Gentiles do. They are ignorant of the truth about God and Jesus. And because of that, they sin greatly in many ways.

Today we learn a new, and difficult, aspect to our walk. We are in chapter 5 of Ephesians.

Ephesians 5:1-2 (HCSB) Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children. And walk in love, as the Messiah also loved us and gave Himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God.

Now God has many good qualities. And we should try to be like Him in all of them. But this text leaves no doubt about the most important one to imitate. It is God's love we must imitate. This love was demonstrated to us in God sending us a Savior. This love was also demonstrated to us in the Savior, Jesus, giving His life for our sins. Of all God's characteristics, love stands out. John, an early missionary, writes of this.

1 John 4:8 (HCSB) ... God is love.

The defining characteristic of God is love. We are to imitate the love of our God. We are to walk in love. We are to love as God does, like we see in Jesus. Jesus teaches us to love like God.

Yet we find it hard to do so. We find it hard to walk in love towards others. Why is this? Why do we find it hard to love as God does? Let me suggest several reasons.

1. Our differences make it hard to love like God. If we were all the same, we would have not much trouble loving each other. But our differences make it hard to love each other.

2. Our pride makes it hard to love like God. The cure for pride is the humility of Jesus. We must choose to adopt this humility for ourselves. It was Jesus' humility that brought Him to earth as the God/Man. It was Jesus' humility that led Him to live a perfect life of perfect faith, hope, and love of God. And it was His humility that enabled Him to die on the cross for our sins. To love like Jesus we must humble ourselves like Jesus.

3. Living for self instead of God makes it hard to love like God. We are naturally focused on self instead of on God. We don't think about doing so. We just live that way without even thinking about it. It is the natural sinful way we live. We have to unlearn this behavior. We have to learn to make God the center of our lives. We must seek godliness. **Godliness is seeking out God's will and living it.**

For the fourth reason it is hard for us to love others, we need to go back to Ephesians 5. In the verses following what we have already read, he speaks of some sins that we covered last week. Then he draws a conclusion for us in verse 6.

Ephesians 5:6-7 (HCSB) Let no one deceive you with empty arguments, for God's wrath is coming on the disobedient because of these things. Therefore, do not become their partners.

Do not become partners with those who do not serve Jesus Christ. Do not go into business with those who do not serve Jesus. Do not marry someone who does not serve Jesus. Don't even date someone who does not serve Jesus. Don't become partners with those who do not serve Jesus. Their basis for living is different than yours. Their loyalty is to someone different than yours. Their understanding of the world is different from yours. And their behavior is different than the Christian's.

Do not accept their false beliefs. Do not imitate their values. Do not compromise God's standards. Last week we saw how the Gentiles lack basic truth about the one, true, living God, Yahweh, maker of heaven and earth. Our world still lacks this knowledge today. We view the world differently than unbelievers do. For some, their world view is centered on a made up god named Allah. For others, their world view is centered on reincarnation. For others, their world view is based on ancestor worship. They view the world fundamentally different than we do. Their understanding is darkened, based on false information, false ideas.

Our view of the world is based on the understanding that God has given to us of Himself in the Bible. We cannot become partners with those who do not have this world view.

Ephesians 5:7-10 (HCSB) Therefore, do not become their partners. For you were once darkness, but now [you are] light in the Lord. Walk as children of light—for the fruit of the light [results] in all goodness, righteousness, and truth—discerning what is pleasing to the Lord.

He reminds them that they used to be darkened in their understanding. That was his description in 4:18 of them as Gentiles before they became Jesus followers. They used to be darkness. Now they are light in Jesus. Now they know the truth. They have learned the truth about God, people, sin, salvation, judgment, heaven, and hell. He tells them to walk in that truth. This truth is the light He is speaking of. This creates the third reason it is hard to love others.

4. Walking in love, while walking as light makes it hard to love like God.

We must walk in love to our world, but we must also walk as light to our world. We must love people as Jesus did, but not back down from the revealed truth of God as we do so.

And that creates a problem. This living in love as light is not easy to do in a dark world. If we only focused on one, that would be easier. If we focused on love and not light, it would be easier. Or if we focused on light, but not love, that would be easier. But we are not given that option. We are commanded to walk in love and walk as children of light. We must someone figure out how to do both at the same time to all people.

The people who have bought into today's American cultural values love the love of Jesus from us. They welcome that. But they do not want the truth of Jesus from us. The love of Jesus from us, this they want. But the truth of Jesus to us they do not want.

The people who have bought into today's American cultural values do not want to hear that their practices and lifestyles are sinful or immoral. They do not want to hear that their beliefs about God are wrong. They do not want to hear that God has given us a standard of morality and absolute truth that must be obeyed or else face the judgment of God.

They want their new unrestricted lifestyle to be fully accepted by all Americans. This we cannot do. We would have to quit walking as the light of truth to our world in order to do that. We do not accept their way of life as legitimate in the church.

Some of them would possibly be satisfied with that. They would be satisfied if we only walked as children of light here in the church. But many are trying to walk as children of light out there in the world, and not even appear to be accepting of darkness. That is creating problems for all of us. These kinds of problems have been in the news lately as Christians try to walk as light out in the world.

The new American culture is backing us into a corner. We do not share the same values, the same moral base. We do not share the same beliefs about marriage and gender and other issues. That makes it more and more difficult to balance walking in love and as light.

It isn't like we do not agree about anything. Those opposed to us agree with us on some things. They are not asking us to accept murderers as murderers. They are not wanting to say that murder is okay. They are not saying we should accept abusers as abusers. They are not saying abusing others is okay. They are not saying that we should accept thieves as thieves. They are not saying that thievery is okay. We agree with them that these things are wrong and there are laws against such things.

Where we are having difficulty agreeing is on the things that were once against the law, but are now lawful. Yet, to us, they are sinful, immoral. This is where the problem lies. They are asking us to accept something as normal that not too long ago was not considered normal or legal.

So Christians, the church, is being backed into a corner. There are four primary approaches to dealing with this dilemma that Christians are choosing.

1. You can choose to withdraw from culture. You limit most of your recreation, social, and educational experiences to the church. You only hang out with other Christians. Your kids are only in church sponsored little leagues. You may have your kids in private church schools. You don't engage in social interaction with neighbors or the neighborhood. You withdraw from culture.

As far as love and light goes, it ignores both. This is not walking in love towards others nor is it living as light towards others. It ignores both commands.

In some ways this is the easiest choice. If the whole church takes basically the same approach, it is easier than the other choices I'll mention. This approach is not new. Some Christian groups have done this for a hundred years or more. You might think of some denominations that do this.

2. You can choose to battle culture. This is the moral majority approach, for those of you old enough to remember that movement. There are Christians taking this approach to the current issues.

Some of those practicing civil disobedience are in this group, but not only by this group. The first group would not likely practice civil disobedience. They are withdrawing from culture, not trying to change it.

If you are paying attention to the national news, you will recognize that some who follow Jesus, or say they do, are taking this approach to what is going on in America. They are battling to halt the progress of certain ideas. They are trying to limit how much THEY will be affected by certain new ideas being propagated in society. (I am purposely being vague this morning because of some of the more immature in the room.) If you don't know or are not sure what I'm talking about, you can see me after the service.

The battle culture approach is all about walking as light, but is almost empty of walking in love. They talk love, but it doesn't come across in their actions, at least not to unbelievers, the ones we are trying to reach with the Gospel.

3. You can choose to compromise with culture.

Then some are compromising. They either ignore the truth of the Bible, water it down, or change its meaning in certain passages altogether. For example, some have taken all the gay-as-sin passages to mean promiscuous and not at all committed monogamous relationships. Thereby they buy into what the opposition wants. They do this in order to be accepted by culture.

This approach emphasizes walking in love and almost disregards walking as light altogether.

4. You can choose to try to balance the tension between walking in love and walking as light to culture.

This is the most difficult way. Some are writing about it. It is not the most popular choice. It is trying to walk in love to all people, and yet walk as children of the truth to all people.

We must walk in love. All people are loved by God. Jesus died for non-Christians as much as for us who have received Jesus as Savior and Lord. Do not let yourself think otherwise. We are no better sinners because we have received Jesus. We receive more blessings, but we are not better people. God does not love us more. God does not love them less than He loves us.

Invitation:

What do you want from God? Do you want a religion or a relationship? People all over the world substitute a religion for a relationship with God. They make up their own religion or they adopt someone else's religion.

The truth about God is only found in Jesus Christ. Do you want a relationship with the God who made you? Then you must come to Him through Jesus.

In Jesus we learn of our sinfulness.

In Jesus we learn we need a Savior, and that Jesus is the only Savior that will do.

In Jesus we learn that God paid the ransom that sin demanded of us.

Today, you can be forgiven of all of your sin and come into a right relationship with God if you will receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord.