

Today we are wrapping up this series of sermons titled Walk Worthy. 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 as a figure of speech in the Bible for how we live, how we talk and behave towards others. It is used this way five times in the book of Ephesians, in 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. So we are to try to live up to that privilege as if we were worthy of it.

Second, we are not to walk like the Gentiles do. They are ignorant of the truth about God and Jesus. We are not to walk in their sins.

Last week we learned about walking in love and walking as light. We are to imitate God's love for all people. But at the same time, we are walk as light to all people. This means to speak the truth about God, sin, and salvation through Jesus. It is not often easy to do both. There is a tension between trying to walk in love and walk as light as we engage our current American culture. I see Christians responding to this tension in one of four primary ways.

1. You can choose to withdraw from culture. That means you are going to run from the current culture. You limit your contact with people who are not Christians or not a part of your church. Your recreation and socializing are all with family or church. You don't make friends with unbelievers, maybe with no one outside of your church. You limit your contact with unbelievers as much as possible. As far as walking in love and as light, you choose basically to do neither, at least outside of your church.

2. You can choose to battle culture. Some Christians are openly resisting the cultural changes taking place. They may be trying to halt the changes or even reverse some. But they believe in what they are doing as God's will. But their approach seems to be mostly walking as light and very little walking in love.

3. You can choose to compromise with culture. Some, who call themselves Christian, are just going along with the changes in American culture. I heard one famous Christian say that Jesus would approve of same gender marriage. Some are giving alternate interpretations of texts that God's people have agreed on for 2000 years. They are proposing that God was not against all same gender sexual activity, but only promiscuous behavior. They are reinterpreting God's truth. This approach emphasizes walking in love, while walking as light is laid aside.

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. You want to live love towards other people while at the same time, when appropriate, sharing the truth of the Gospel.

Now for the illustration. This is a real illustration. Several people in our church family have been invited to same-gender weddings. It may happen to you. It may be a close family friend or a relative. You might respond in one of these four ways.

For example, you might take the withdraw from culture approach and run from the invitation somehow. I don't see how you can avoid lying to the person if you take this approach. You would have to say something like, "My church won't let me", or, "Oh, I'm sorry. I'm going to be out of town that weekend. I've already paid for the trip and it can't be changed." You would have to lie in order to avoid the truth. You neither show God's love to this person nor try to share God's truth.

Or you could take the battle culture approach. You use this as an opportunity to point out what you believe about such weddings. "No, I believe such things are sinful. I will not come to such a wedding. I will not even appear to be condoning such a thing. You need to get right with God and repent of this sin." This approach is all light and no love.

Or you could take the compromise with culture approach. You go to the wedding. You go to the reception. You act as if everything is normal and within God's revealed truth. Maybe you believe it is. Or maybe you just keep what you believe to yourself. This approach emphasizes love and leaves out light altogether.

Or you could take the fourth approach. And I have two different options here. One would say something like, "I would love to be able to celebrate your special day with you. I really would. I love you. I want what is best for you. You know that. I have never done anything but accept you for who you see yourself to be. But my first commitment is to God as I understand Him. I believe the Bible is His revelation to me and it calls this sin. Just as I would not expect you to go against your values to support me, I cannot go against mine even to attend this event. I am sorry if that disappoints you or hurts your feelings. That is not my intention. I hope you don't take it personally. I am still your friend. I still love you. But I cannot attend your wedding." This approach seeks to maintain a relationship with this person without condoning what they are doing. This is trying to walk in love and walk as light.

In the other option to walking in love and as light you might go to the wedding, continuing to build a relationship with this person, and seeking to be light as well. If you are married, you might say something like, "I thought getting married would make me totally happy. But I have found that a spouse cannot make me as happy as God planned me to be. I found that kind of happiness in Jesus. Can I tell you about Jesus?" And then if they are open, share Jesus with them. Invite them to talk at another time. Invite them to your church. The goal is to live love towards them now, and hope to be light to them later. This approach, too, seeks to walk in love and as light to them.

I want to present a possibility for this summer. We could have a child come to our Vacation Bible School who has never been in a church before, never heard about Jesus, and has a great time. On Friday night his parents come and we find they are both men, or both women. They are moved by their child's experience and begin attending our church and hear the gospel and get saved. That is what we want to have happen. But it will only happen as we love them first and present the gospel at the right time. Once they know Jesus, the Holy Spirit can convict them of sin.

You can see that this is no easy matter. You could possibly think of other approaches. There may not be one correct approach for every Christian in every situation that may come up. And there are hundreds of various situations that are coming up as our culture changes and moves further and further from Biblical values and morality. For example the same gender weddings and marriages create a lot of different situations for Christians and church to deal with. Now the transgender bathroom issues are creating even more difficult questions.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we need wisdom. Not everyone has wisdom. Some years ago, in San Francisco, a man walked into a downtown Bank of America, took a deposit slip and wrote, "This is a stickup. Put all your MANY in this bag." While standing in line waiting to give his note to the teller, he began to worry that someone had seen him write the note and might call the police before he reached the teller window. So, he left the Bank of America and crossed the street to the Wells Fargo bank. After waiting a few minutes in line, he handed his note to the Wells Fargo teller. She read it and guessed from his spelling errors that he was not the brightest bank robber in the world. So she told him that she could not accept his stickup note because it was written on a Bank of America deposit slip. She said he would either have to fill out a Wells Fargo deposit slip or go back to the Bank of America. Looking somewhat defeated, the man said "OKAY" and left the Wells Fargo Bank. The Wells Fargo teller then called the police and they arrested the man a few minutes later as he was waiting in line back at the Bank of America.

Now other than the need for wisdom that story has nothing to do with today's sermon. I figured you needed a good laugh in the midst of the heaviness of what I've been speaking about.

We need wisdom. We need God's guidance in figuring out how to walk in love and walk as light in today's America. That brings us to today's passage.

Paul, the early Christian missionary, has been encouraging us in how to walk and he has given us four ways of walking. Three were positive, walk like this, and one was negative, don't walk like this. He has given us both positive things to do, like be patient with each other, and negative things to avoid, things like lying to each other. We get his last lesson on walking in Ephesians, chapter 5, beginning in verse 15.

Ephesians 5:15-21 (HCSB) Pay careful attention, then, to how you walk—not as unwise people but as wise— making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So don't be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. And don't get drunk with wine, which [leads to]* reckless actions (unrestrained behavior)*, but be filled by the Spirit: speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music from your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of Christ.

***NOTE: Words in brackets [] are implied in the Greek text.
Words in parenthesis () are alternate interpretations for clarity.**

Be very careful how you walk, how you live. Live wisely, not unwisely.
What is wise walking?

Make the most of every opportunity to behave like Jesus.

We could apply the phrase "make the most of the time" to many different kinds of things. You could make the most of every opportunity to practice a musical instrument. You could make the most of every opportunity to spoil your grandchildren. You could make the most of every opportunity to eat dessert first. We could apply it to all kinds of different opportunities. But within the context of what he has been saying since verse one of chapter four he is encouraging us to wisely use every opportunity we have to walk like Jesus. To be as specific as he has been in this letter we should...

Make the most of every opportunity to be patient with others.
Make the most of every opportunity to humble ourselves.
Make the most of every opportunity to be gentle towards others.
Make the most of every opportunity to overlook small sins against you.
Make the most of every opportunity to speak truthfully.
Make the most of every opportunity to encourage each other.
Make the most of every opportunity to control your anger.

These are the specifics he has been giving us on walking like Jesus, of imitating God. Wise walking makes the most of every opportunity to behave like Jesus.

We need to make the most of the time we have because the days are evil. We have less common ground with unbelievers than before. We have less opportunities to make the most of. So when we get them, we need to make the most of them. There is increasing pressure upon Christians to compromise our beliefs, our moral positions, and even our faith in Jesus.

These days are more evil in America than twenty years ago. Twenty years ago was more evil than 40 years ago. You teens and young adults have not lived long enough to see the changes. You see things and may think it has been this way for a long time. It has not. What we see happening today is relatively recent. America is sliding down into an immoral abyss of depravity, greed, and rebelliousness. These days are evil. Therefore we must make the most of every opportunity to make a difference for Jesus, one person at a time. How you treat one person will not change the course of America. But it may lead to that person getting saved from his or her sins. We must make the most of the time.

Again he speaks to the necessity of wisdom. Verse 17 says, "Therefore don't be foolish" or unwise, "but understand what the Lord's will is." He has been revealing to us the Lord's Will. All of these instructions about how to walk or not walk are the Lord's will. **Seek out the Lord's will and live it at each opportunity.**

Everything he has been instructing us to do will take careful thought and self-control. We must be learning. We must learn from each other and other Christians how to deal with the opportunities that will come up. I encourage you to read. Read the books, magazine articles, and blogs about how different Christians are responding in love or as light. See what their motivation seems to be in terms of these two. See what the outcome is. We want every person to become a follower of Jesus Christ. To do that, they must encounter the gospel. But if we present other truth first, they may never hear

the gospel. It may be that every possible approach will not contribute to that happening. Talk to each other about these things. Seek God's wisdom through other Christians.

Grasping the Lord's will, will take learning and thought. It will also take help.

Yield yourself in all opportunities to the Holy Spirit.

We must avoid those things that tend to weaken our self-control. That is the point of the next statement.

Ephesians 5:18 (HCSB) And don't get drunk with wine, which [leads to] reckless actions, but be filled by [the] Spirit:

Wine, of course, is not the only thing that can lead to unrestrained behavior. Other alcoholic drinks and many drugs can also do so. In addition there may be person you hang out with who always leads you into trouble. You must learn to be led by the Spirit instead of your friend, when you are with your friend. Maybe there are places you put yourself in which you are always tempted to be reckless and undisciplined.

To be filled by the Spirit means to be yielded to God. To do this you pray such things as... **"God, I belong to You today. Fill me with Your Spirit and guide me in each situation of this day, each opportunity to represent You well."**

A literal translation of this phrase is to "be being filled with the Spirit". This shows the application is something we must do all day long, not once in a lifetime or just once a day.

While God's commands and principles are presented in the Bible, and we do and should study it together, you will face situations and temptations every day that you need immediate guidance for. The Holy Spirit works supernaturally to guide you all day. I would not be here if not for this work of the Holy Spirit. I rely on the Spirit to guide me every day. You need to do so also.

One powerful way to keep your focus wise is through worship.

Make praise and thanksgiving the two strongest habits of your walk.

Ephesians 5:19-20 (HCSB) "...singing and making music from your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ..."

Be intentional about how you walk. Don't let your mind stray far from God. None of us stays full of the Spirit all the time—no one is always totally joyful and submissive to God. But this should still be our aim, our goal, our great longing.

Jesus died for us to bring us into the will of God. That is the wisest place to be. Choose to walk wisely, in Jesus, with the rest of your life.

You can see the darkness of the world. If you know anything of God's will as revealed in the Bible, you can see the world getting darker, more sinful, more degraded. The world is headed for hell.

Without Jesus you are headed there too. Won't you choose to be saved to God? Be saved from your sins in Jesus.