



*To Know Christ . . .  
and to Make Him Known*

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### Walk This Way Ephesians 4:17 – 5:2

Could you walk a straight line if you were blindfolded?

According to National Public Radio's science correspondent Robert Krulwich, you can't, and neither can I. None of us can for more than a short distance.

In a November 2010 interview on *Morning Edition*, Krulwich talked about a study conducted by the German scientist Jan Souman. He blindfolded his subjects, then asked them to walk in a straight line for an hour. Not one of them could do it. Of course they all *thought* they were walking in a straight line, until their blindfolds were removed and they saw their crooked path.

In the interview Krulwich observed:

This tendency has been studied now for at least a century. We animated field tests from the 1920s, so you can literally see what happens to men who are blindfolded and told to walk across a field in a straight line, or swim across a lake in a straight line . . . , and they couldn't. In the animation, you see them going in these strange loop-de-loops in either direction. Apparently, there's a profound inability in humans to [walk] straight.

Now this research found that there is one way and only one way that we can walk in a straight line, and that's by focusing on something out ahead of us—a building, a landmark, a mountain, or the like. If we can focus on something ahead of us, we can force ourselves to avoid our normal crooked course. As Krulwich concludes, “Without external cues, there's apparently something in us that makes us turn.”<sup>1</sup>

#### ***Our walk in this world***

In reality, what this study found about how we walk physically is just as true spiritually. The Apostle Paul knew that well.

Here in his letter to the Ephesians, Paul used the image of *walking* to talk about our way of life as we journey through this world. He introduces this metaphor in 2:2 when he says we all **formerly walked according to the course of this world,**<sup>2</sup> and repeats it when he says in 2:10 that since God has redeemed us in Christ, **we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.** Then as Paul talks about how followers of Jesus are to live their lives in relationship to Christ, the church, and the world around them, he uses the image *five times* in the ethical instructions section of the letter (chs. 4-

6):

- walking in a manner worthy of their calling (4:1),
- no longer walking as the Gentiles do (4:17),
- walking in love (5:2),
- walking as children of light (5:8), and
- walking carefully and wisely (5:15).

Our text this morning, Ephesians 4:17 – 5:2, takes in two of these “walk” sayings, and tells us both how not to walk and how to walk. It’s as though Paul is saying to his ancient readers and to us, “Walk this way, not that!”

Unfortunately, that’s a word that needs to be heard today by professing Christians. It’s a word that says clearly that for Christians, *morality matters*.

Now let me clarify from the very outset that I’m not talking about *moralism*. Our morality can never save us, no matter how moral we may be. Even the most moral person will be lost without Christ. In fact, for some, their high morality may even be a hindrance to their putting their trust in Christ. Since they’re moral, they have difficulty accepting the fact that they, like every other human being, are sinners deserving of eternal separation from God in hell. In that case, their morality has given rise to the ultimate sin—vain pride before God, thinking they don’t need Him or His grace in Christ because they are good enough on their own.

What I am talking about is genuine Christian *morality* that’s a way of life that reflects Christ’s presence and work in our lives. It’s the spiritual formation of the disciple’s character in the likeness of Jesus Christ. And that’s what Paul is talking about here.

But in our society today, morality has been in decline. In fact, in our current culture, it’s often mocked and despised, or at best relativized—you know what I mean—since, according to the culture, all truth is relative, then you can’t say that what’s right or wrong for you is necessarily right or wrong for someone else.

If you’ve ever played board games with your family, somewhere along the way you may have played Milton Bradley’s *The Game of Life*. What you may not know is that through past couple of centuries, the game has gone through several variations that reflect the changing values of the culture. In 1798, before Bradley was born, a board game from England came to the United States that was called *The New Game of Human Life*. Acquiring virtues advanced you more quickly through the game, while acquiring vices slowed you down. Parents played this game with their children. The point of the game was that “life is a voyage that begins at birth and ends at death. God is at the helm, fate is cruel, and your reward lies beyond the grave.”

Then Milton Bradley invented a simple board game in 1860, a lot like its precursor. He called it *The Checkered Game of Life*. Honesty and Bravery formed the good path, while the difficult path included Idleness and Disgrace. Industry and Perseverance led to Wealth and Success. Bradley described it as “a highly moral game . . . that encourages children to lead exemplary lives and entertains both old and young with the spirit of friendly competition.”

A hundred years later in 1960, the Milton Bradley Company released a commemorative edition. It was called *The Game of Life*. It sold 35 million copies. In this version you earn money, buy furniture, and have babies. There are no vices and virtues. The winner is the one who at “Life’s Day of Reckoning” has acquired the most money and retires to Millionaire Acres.

Then in the 1990s the company’s designers tried to make the game less about money. They emphasized good deeds—things like saving an endangered species or solving a pollution

problem. In the 2011 version, players can attend school, travel, start a family, or whatever they want. It's all about earning points, and if they earn enough points, they can reward themselves with a sports car. There is no end or last square to the game. A player can stop any time; there's no end to the game. The box says, "A Thousand Ways to Live Your Life! You Choose." And values are all up-for-grabs—you get as many points for scuba diving as you get for donating a kidney. The description on the website says: "Do whatever it takes to retire in style with the most wealth at the end of the game."<sup>3</sup>

Now it's bad enough that this is the way the world is today. What troubles me is that it's this way for many who profess to be Christians!

### ***Don't walk like the Gentiles***

It must have been that way in Paul's day, too. He begins this passage by saying that believers must no longer walk as the Gentiles do (4:17). So how did the Gentiles walk?

Their thinking was futile (4:17b). Their understanding was darkened (4:18a). They were excluded and separated from the life of God because of their spiritual ignorance and the hardness of their hearts (4:18b). They had become callous, or as the NIV<sup>®</sup> puts it, they had **lost all sensitivity** (4:19a). They had **given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness** (4:19b).

But to these Christians, Paul says, **But you did not learn Christ in this way** (4:20). The truth in Jesus that they had been taught instructed them to **lay aside the old self** that was **being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit**, to **be renewed in the spirit of [their] mind** (4:23), and to **put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness** (4:24, NIV<sup>®</sup>).

So what does it look like for believers to live as they have been taught in Christ?

We are to deal truthfully with one another, recognizing that as part of the body of Christ **we are members of one another** (4:25). We are to deal properly with our anger, not sinning because of it and not leaving it unresolved at the end of the day, realizing that such unresolved anger gives the devil an opportunity in our lives (4:26-27). Rather than stealing from others, we are to labor in honest work, not only to provide for our own needs and those of our families, but also so that we will have something to share with those in need (4:28).

Our conversation is to be constructive rather than corrupting, building others up and ministering **grace to those who hear** (4:29). We're not to **grieve the Holy Spirit** who has sealed us for the day of redemption by failing to live as we have been taught in Christ (4:30). We are to put away all ill feelings—**all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander . . . along with all malice** (4:31). Instead, we're to be kind, tender-hearted, and forgiving toward one another, **just as God in Christ has forgiven [us]** (4:32). True forgiveness *confronts* when necessary, then sets aside the offense so that it's no longer an obstacle in the relationship. But this forgiveness doesn't necessarily prevent consequences; *e.g.*, a man who lost his leg in accident when he was drunk may be forgiven, but he still has lost a leg!

Paul sums up what he's saying here by calling us to **be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, as Christ loved you and gave Himself up for us . . .** (5:1-2). The imitation he's talking about here was the way character was formed in the ancient world—children followed the example of their parents, or students their teachers, etc. Paul says that we're to imitate God!

### ***Christian morality***

Now Paul doesn't cover every area of moral choices in these instructions. His purpose wasn't to give us a list of rules. What he was focusing on was *the formation of Christian character* in

followers of Jesus. And these instructions imply two things:

- 1) Christian morality is both negative and positive. There are things that as Christians we ought not to do, and things that we ought to do; and
- 2) Christian morality calls for a lifestyle that is distinctively different from the pagan world around us!

In other words, *followers of Jesus should not walk like pagans; we should walk in the way of Christ.*

C. S. Lewis describes it this way:

People often think of Christian morality as a kind of bargain in which God says, “If you keep a lot of rules, I’ll reward you, and if you don’t I’ll do the other thing.” I do not think that is the best way of looking at it. I would much rather say that every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before. And taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, all your life long you are slowly turning this central thing either into a Heaven creature or into a hellish creature: either into a creature that is in harmony with God, and with other creatures, and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God, and with its fellow creatures and with itself. To be the one kind of creature is Heaven: that is, it is joy, and peace, and knowledge, and power. To be the other means madness, horror, idiocy, rage, impotence, and eternal loneliness. Each of us at each moment is progressing to the one state or the other.<sup>4</sup>

So which way are you walking? How are you walking, and where will it lead you?

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<sup>1</sup> Steve Inskip, “Mystery: Why We Can’t Walk Straight?” (NPR: *Morning Edition*, Nov. 22, 2010); <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2011/may/5050211.html> (accessed 8/7/18).

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®.

<sup>3</sup> Jill Lepore, “The Meaning of Life,” *The New Yorker* (May 21, 2007); <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2011/october/5102411.html> (accessed 8/9/18).

<sup>4</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1960), 86-87.