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WALKING IN HOLINESS

Justin Hopkins

The Christian life is to be a holy life. The concept of holiness is one that we often see in a religious context, but what does it really mean for us in our everyday lives? How does one become holy? How do you know if you are walking in holiness? What example can we look to?

What Does It Mean To Be Holy?

The concept of holiness centers around being set apart or dedicated to a specific purpose. This is exemplified in the Old Testament system of worship. Holiness within the context of Christianity is the idea of being dedicated to the service of God and being set apart from sin. God himself is holy (Lev. 11:45). As such, He is by nature set apart from sin (Hab. 1:13). It is because of His holiness that we are called to be holy (1 Pet. 1:15). So holiness, then, is being set apart from sin and wickedness. The other side of the coin is the dedication that comes with holiness. It isn't enough just to empty ourselves of that which is evil, but we must be filled with that which is godly. After all, we are called to be holy because that is how we become like our Father. We see these essential components of holiness revealed to us in the Gospel (Rom. 1:17).

How Is Holiness Accomplished?

Essential to being holy is being cleansed from sin. We cannot accomplish this by simply stopping sin and starting to do that which is right. The stain of sin remains (Hag. 2:11-14). That is why to become holy, we need the cleansing blood of Jesus, which can only be initially contacted in the waters of baptism (Eph. 5:25-27). This is why His sacrifice on the cross was essential (Col. 1:20-22). If we want to be among those who are holy, we must appeal to Christ and His authority for cleansing (1 Cor. 1:2). While it has always been God's plan that those who are in Christ should be holy (Eph. 1:4), there is work that each one of us must do to maintain the holiness achieved by putting on Christ in baptism. That means that we must actively work to keep ourselves and our lives separate from sin and its defiling effects (Eph. 5:3-8). Then we must strive each day to fill our lives with a dedication to God (Rom. 12:1-2). We must continually and actively cultivate a mind and a lifestyle that is dedicated to the service of Christ (Col. 3:12-17). That means being obedient to His commandments (Rev. 14:12).

Jesus: The Perfect Example of Holiness

There is no greater example of holiness on this earth than Christ. He faced all the struggles that we do, but kept Himself separated from sin (Heb. 4:15). He was also entirely dedicated to pleasing God (John 8:29). He perfectly embodied the Holy God of the burning bush, so that those who see Jesus see the Father (John 14:9).

Practical Suggestions for Walking in Holiness

An ancient Chinese proverb tells us that "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." The walk of holiness must begin somewhere. It begins at the waters of Baptism (Rev. 20:6). Only those who are in Christ have been made holy. If you are not yet a Christian, then start there. Once we are in Christ, we must be careful about who we allow to influence our lives. Holiness is separation. There was a reason why God separated Israel from other people (Lev. 20:26). Surround yourself with those who are walking in holiness. Paul has much to say about the things we should eliminate from

our lives to achieve holiness (Eph. 5:1-8, Col. 3:1-11). To be holy, we must care about the things of the Lord (1 Cor. 7:34). Spend time in God's Word. You can't practice what you don't know. Then work on building a holy character. Develop the Christian graces in your life (2 Pet. 1:5-8; Col. 3:12-17). Finally, remember the goal (2 Pet. 3:11-13).

For Further Study

- What does the separation of holiness look like practically for you?
- Why is holiness impossible for someone who has not obeyed the Gospel?
- What character traits do you personally need to work on as you walk in holiness?
- Why does holiness require a knowledge of the Bible?
- What about Jesus' holiness stands out the most to you?
- Why does holiness begin in the heart?
- Do you think of yourself as holy? Why or why not?

WALKING WITH COURAGE (JOSH. 1:9)

Justin Gonzalez

What is courage? Courage is not finding yourself in a situation and being forced to react. Rather, courage is seeing a situation and deciding to move intentionally toward it—against all odds and all dangers. When choosing to be a husband, father, and leader, you must weigh the gravity of that decision. It takes courage to walk the path of a lifelong commitment.

God commands courage from his people (Josh. 1:6-9).

- Be strong and of good courage (Josh. 1:6a).
- Only be strong and very courageous (Josh. 1:7a).
- It takes courage to follow God's law (Josh. 1:7b).
- Courage is taught by God's word (Josh. 1:8).
- God commands courage, don't be afraid (Josh. 1:9).

Walking with courage means I know where I stand (Phil. 2:12).

- Work out your salvation (Phil. 2:12).
- It takes courage to resist the devil (1 Pet. 5:8-9).
- Courage means taking a stand to be God's man (Gal. 5:1).

Having courage means being intentional with your family (Deut. 6:4-9).

- Be courageous, protect your family from all threats (Eph. 5:25).
- Have the courage to raise your kids right (Eph. 6:4, Prov. 22:6).
- Lead your family to worship without fail (Heb. 10:24-26).

Have the courage to walk your family away from the world (Judg. 2:10-13).

- Tell your family of the dangers of leaving God's fellowship (2 Tim. 4:10).
- Have courage to be all in for Christ (Rev. 3:16, Rev. 2:10).
- It takes courage to fight for your family's salvation (Heb. 6:4-6).

Walking with courage means being with your family for eternity (2 Sam. 12:23).

- Leading your family to walk with God brings them peace (Isa. 54:13) .
- Lead your family to walk in truth and see the reward (3 John 1:4).
- It takes courage to protect your heritage (Ps. 127:3-5) .

For Further Study

- Am I courageous in my own faith?
- Am I protecting my family's spiritual and physical lives?
- Am I making worship non-negotiable for my family?
- How would I feel if my family didn't make it to heaven?
- What can I do now to correct my path with godly courage?

WALKING THROUGH DISAGREEMENT

Luann Rogers

Disagreement is inevitable because we all have our own (sometimes very different) thoughts and opinions. Disagreement may revolve around opinions or doctrine, and it's our responsibility to discern which is which. With doctrine, God's Word is what determines what is right and wrong: With opinions we have "yours vs. mine," so who's right and who's wrong? My opinion is not doctrine, and neither is yours, so how do we walk together when we disagree over opinions?

Romans 14:17 says some things "don't matter" (spiritually) – "the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking" – but things that are spiritually important that DO matter – "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." These are the things we should concern ourselves with.

Christians are a spiritual family, so our opinions really don't matter in the long run; the doctrine of Christ is what holds us together.

We can disagree without being disagreeable.

You don't have to agree with your Christian sister all of the time, but you do have to love her all of the time AND treat her kindly. When we disagree to the point of being contentious, we are acting like worldly people instead of children of God.

- Be Kind (Eph. 4:32).
- Love one another (Rom. 12:10).
- Submit to one another (Eph. 5:21).
- Put others first (Phil. 2:1-5).

We can disagree without judging one another.

- Be a doer, not a "judge" (Jam. 4:11).
- Do not judge your sister based on her life choices (John 7:24).
- Don't judge and condemn one another based on your opinion (Luke 6:37).
- Christ will be our judge (Rom. 14:10).

We can disagree and be at peace with each other.

- Pursue things which make for peace (Rom. 14:19).
- Peace depends on you (Rom. 12:18).
- "Season" everything with peace (Mark 9:50).
- Peace is a bond, like glue (Eph. 4:1-3).
- Without peace, we won't see the Lord (Heb. 12:14).
- Peace is righteousness (Jas. 3:17-18).

Any fool can start a quarrel (Prov. 20:3), so don't be a fool! If we are not careful, disagreements can quickly turn into divisions within our congregation (Prov. 17:14).

For Further Study

- List some things that Christian sisters disagree about.
- Divide your list into doctrinal things and opinions.
- What are some other words we could use to describe a disagreement?
- How should we handle disagreements about political things?
- Should we divide ourselves over matters of opinion?
- Discuss ways that we can deal with disagreements over matters of opinion.
- What harm can come from “taking sides” on matters of opinion?
- Why do you think disagreement feels threatening to most people?
- What does humility look like during a disagreement?
- What are barriers to truly listening to a different opinion?
- What happens when we have truth, but no grace – or grace but no truth?
- What is one relationship in your life where you may need to take a step toward peace?
- What would that step look like in practical terms? (e.g., making a call, choosing a softer tone, offering an apology?)
- Additional scripture references for further study about “quarrels” – Genesis 13:7; Romans 13:13; 1 Corinthians 3:3 (KJV “debate” = quarrel, not simply disagreement); 2 Timothy 2:23-24; Proverbs 17:14 & 20:3.

WALKING IN HUMILITY (PHIL. 2:3-5)

Ross Haffner

In a world that celebrates self-promotion, climbing the ladder, and clinging to power, the Bible dares to call pride what it truly is: the root of selfishness, division, and spiritual failure. Philippians 2:3-5 stresses unity and selfless sacrifice, and the link that connects the two is humility. Following the example of Jesus will suffice to cure selfishness, pride, and arrogance while lovingly teaching humility and service to others.

Don't seek self (selfish ambition). When selfish we can do the right thing, and it can still be wrong if done for the wrong motivation (Phil. 1:15-17). Serving to make ourselves look good is not really service. At the same time, we should make sure we do not neglect our own needs in the name of being selfless. Preachers and elders who have burned themselves out so they can no longer serve should have taken steps earlier to preserve their time of service, if possible. Men want to be of use to their families but fail when they are absent physically or emotionally, work themselves to death, or selfishly see to their needs only. Neither way honors God.

Don't be too pleased with yourself (conceit). Many of us have an inflated view of self, and God hates pride (Prov. 6:16-17). We should be careful about our attitude when others seek to honor us. Romans 12:3 warns us not to think too highly of ourselves. If we become too proud of the good decisions we have made in life this can develop into thinking we are the standard. This is condemned and not wise (2 Cor. 10:12). We want to be men from whom people seek advice. We want to be problem solvers, correctors, and mentors. These roles are necessary but we can become overbearing if we do not have the right attitude.

Be humble (lowliness). Humility is a lower view of our own importance. The example for this is Christ Himself, as He submissively set aside His needs for others (Phil. 2:8). If we are not able to submit ourselves, pride will rule and shame us (Prov. 11:2; 29:23). Boldness and confidence are not the opposite of humility, as seen with John the baptizer or Jesus Himself. Some think humility is neglecting to speak up when necessary or always giving others their way. Preachers, elders, and Christians can faithfully proclaim God's truth and lead others toward God without being arrogant. A good test for lowliness is to ask ourselves whether we are willing to be a failure by earthly standards in order to be a success by heavenly standards (Isa. 6:8-13). Seek to please God in your work for the kingdom rather than chasing some earthly standard of success.

Think of others (esteem others better). Humility is not thinking less of ourselves but more of others. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39). We can look out for others' needs and praise others instead of constantly seeking our own needs. Consider also much damage has been done by stubborn men who have clung to leadership for too long. This could be an elder who has lost some of his discretion due to old age or a deacon who allows his work to languish while he is overwhelmed by difficult and ongoing circumstances in his personal life. Have the humility to know when to step aside from leadership positions and to prepare those who will eventually take your place—like Moses or Elijah.

Look for opportunities to serve others (look out for the interests of others). When Jesus knew His time had come, He washed feet when He could have been focused on Himself (John 13:1). True service is more than just going through the motions; it needs to be in the best interest of others. We should serve God doing things we like to do as well as doing jobs that are not as fun because we have looked at the needs of the person, family, or congregation we are serving. Preachers and elders can fall into the trap of getting excited about their own projects and programs but will not show up with the same enthusiasm for others. Others can sense this so be careful not to unintentionally undermine good efforts but rather look to support those who want to work for God.

Sacrifice your needs for others (Let this mind be in you...). Everything Jesus did was for the benefit of the kingdom, to fulfill the wishes of His Father (John 4:34; 6:38-40; 1 Pet. 3:18). We lose unity when prideful church leaders bind personal opinions and judgments, as well as when they selfishly cling to tolerance of their pet sins. Pride can lead us to become false teachers (Rom. 16:17-18). Arrogant people are not able to admit when they are wrong. Surely this is not the type of leadership we need; it shows that some do not truly have the mind of Christ.

Recognizing the great example of our Lord can help us to have the right attitude. We can avoid pride if we consider others before ourselves – understanding their needs and contributions. Finally, we must acknowledge our strengths and weaknesses through the lens of truth. Reflect on the example of Christ daily, and walk with humility while serving Him.

For Further Study

- What does Philippians 2:3-5 teach about the connection between humility, unity, and following Christ's example? How have you seen a lack of humility damage unity in a church or family setting?
- Can you think of an example from your own life or from Scripture where good actions were undermined by wrong motives?
- Why is it important to avoid both selfish ambition and neglecting your own legitimate needs? How can someone find the balance between selfless service and healthy self-care, especially in roles like parenting, eldership, or ministry?
- In what ways can pride or conceit show up subtly in everyday life (e.g., when receiving praise, giving advice, or comparing yourself to others)? How does Romans 12:3 help guard against thinking too highly of ourselves?
- What are practical ways we can “look out for the interests of others” (Phil. 2:4) in our families, workplaces, or church? Why is being willing to receive service sometimes just as important as giving it?
- How can church leaders (elders, preachers, teachers) demonstrate humility when they need to speak boldly, correct error, or make difficult decisions? Give examples from Scripture of bold yet humble leaders.

WALKING WITH CONTENTMENT (PHIL. 4:11)

Shelby Mayfield

We often confuse privileges as necessities in our time and culture. It's easy to fall into the trap of feeling we are owed the blessings we enjoy, and consider going without them as "hard times." There isn't hot water in the apartment. No A/C in the car. My food is taking too long at the restaurant. I need a bigger house, a fancier car, a better-paying job. In Philippians 4:11, Paul was in prison! And yet we find that he learned how to search out the blessings of God even in the hard times. He called this contentment. How do we adopt the mindset of Paul and learn whatever state we are in to be content?

Disclaimer: This does not mean it is wrong to desire a certain career path or desire a bigger home, etc. It doesn't even mean you shouldn't desire hot water in your apartment! The point is, where is your heart? Where does your strength come from? If you don't obtain that career, if you don't get that bigger house, if you don't have hot water, will you crumble, or will you be able to remain content?

Perspective! (Phil. 4:12,13)

- Paul learned how to find the blessings of God even in the hard times, because it was in his faith in Christ that he put all his stock. What a mindset!
- Paul's perspective was always heaven-ward (Phil. 3:13,14).

Count Your Blessings! (Phil. 1:12-14)

- Paul actually regarded his being in chains as a blessing and opportunity, because it enabled brethren to preach the word in confidence (v. 14), and it enabled him to preach to his captors (v. 13).
- Finding the good enables us to find a way to be thankful even in the most difficult of circumstances.

Give! (Phil. 2:3-5)

- When we focus on the needs of others, it will keep us from worrying so much about the things we do not have. It will also help us to have the mind of Christ.
- Paul was really good at this (Phil. 1:23-26).

For Further Study

- What are some ways in which I struggle with discontentment?
- Do I covet what I do not have? (Heb. 13:5)
- Do I confuse privileges with necessities? (Matt. 6:25,33)
- How can I gain perspective when I feel myself becoming discontent? (Phil. 3:13,14; 4:12,13)
- How can giving to others help me to be content in whatever state I'm in? (Phil. 2:3-5)
- Paul reminds me that God will meet my needs (Phil. 4:19). What things have I been calling "necessities" that I should be calling blessings?
- Count some of your blessings right now. Think of even the smallest things! (Phil. 1:12-14)

WALKING IN LOVE (EPH. 5:2)

Clay Bond

As we consider the word “walk” in the book of Ephesians, we find that it provides the spiritual framework for how we are to live as New Testament Christians. The word itself denotes a lifestyle, not a momentary act of faith. In other words, it truly matters how we live. God calls us to walk worthy of our calling (Eph. 4:1). Our daily walk should reflect Christ—His character, His priorities, and His example. We are to imitate Him in our words, our actions, our attitudes, and our choices.

Perhaps one of the most challenging areas in which to imitate Christ is in walking in love (Eph. 5:2). Yet, even though it may be one of the greatest challenges of the Christian life, walking in love is also one of the clearest evidences that Christ is living in us and transforming us. Here are a few thoughts to consider as it relates to walking in love:

How can men of God apply the command?

- In character (Gal. 5:22-23; Rom. 12:1-2; Col. 3:12-14)
- In daily decisions (1 Cor. 16:14)
- In relationships (John 13:34-35)

What does walking in love say about apathy?

- Biblical love is active (1 John 3:17-18; Jas. 2:15-17)
- Biblical love pays attention (Phil. 2:3-4)
- Biblical love sacrifices (Eph. 5:2; John 15:13)

How does walking in love go against our culture's definition of love?

- Biblical love is grounded in truth (1 Cor. 13:6; Eph. 4:15)
- Biblical love is sacrificial (Rom. 5:8)
- Biblical love is courageous (1 John 4:18)
- Biblical love is steadfast (1 Cor. 13:7-8)
- Biblical love is servant-hearted (John 13:14-15)

Walking in love has to be the highest imitation of Christ. To walk in love is to pattern our behavior after Jesus whose love was sacrificial, patient, and unconditional.

For Further Study

- Does our walk reflect the one who called us?
- In what ways is walking in love connected to imitating God?
- Why do you think Paul uses sacrificial language to describe Christ's love?
- When you think of “walking in love,” what challenges, or fears come to mind?
- Who in your life has modeled Christ-like love for you? What impact did it have?
- Is there a specific relationship in your life where you struggle to walk in love? Why?

WALKING WITH INFLUENCE (ESTH. 4:14)

Lisa Kennedy

We all have an influence on those around us, although we may not always recognize it or utilize it. Most often, we influence others through our example: the things that we say and do everyday. Our influence may be mundane, something small like influencing a dinner choice; or serious, something big like influencing a friend to avoid a temptation to sin. It could be unintentional, like influencing the atmosphere of a room negatively because we are sad; or purposeful, like influencing our children to be thankful in our prayers to God. Our influence might even be godly, like wearing modest clothing; or ungodly, like choosing to prioritize sports or hobbies over worship service.

We do not live in isolation, and as Christians, we must be aware that the way we live will impact others (1 Pet. 2:11-12). However, God expects Christians to not only be aware of their influence, but also to influence in a specific way, a way that points people to Him. Christians are to live as salt and light, influencing people through their good works (Matt. 5:13-16; Phil. 2:15). The gospel was never meant to be kept to ourselves, but rather meant to be spread throughout the world (Matt. 28:18-20). Godly influence helps to spread the gospel.

A Christian's ability to influence others must begin in the heart. If our hearts are not committed to God, we will not be able to influence others to follow Him. Although influence starts in the heart, it is seen through our words and actions (Prov. 4:23). Our words and actions demonstrate that we love God and are committed to Him (John 15:14; 1 John 5:3). Furthermore, our ability to influence others is deepened and broadened by fostering relationships with others. While it is possible to influence those with whom we are not connected, our capacity to impact others is strengthened through developing relationships that show our care towards others.

Christian women are uniquely positioned to influence a variety of people. It may be obvious that if we are married, we are uniquely positioned to influence our husbands (1 Pet. 3:1-6), and if we have children, we are uniquely positioned to influence our children (Prov. 1:8; Eph. 6:1-4; Col. 3:20; 1 Tim. 5:14; 2 Tim. 1:5). However, we are also uniquely positioned to influence others such as our friends (Prov. 27:17), those who have gone through similar life situations as us (Tit. 2:4-5), and children or ladies we teach in Bible class. Christian women fill a beautiful role in godly influence because of the distinctive way that we were created by God. We should be mindful of this blessing, grateful for this blessing, and should use this blessing for the glory of God.

For Further Study

- How did each of these women influence others?
 - Rebekah (Gen. 25:20-28; Gen. 27:1-40)
 - Abigail (1 Sam. 25)
 - Naomi (Ruth 1-4)
 - Dorcas (Acts 9:36-43)

- Lois and Eunice (2 Tim, 1:3-7; 2 Tim. 3:14-17)
- Priscilla (Acts 18:24-28)
- Name three things that can hurt a Christian woman's ability to influence others.
- Think about your typical week. Identify people that you come into contact with regularly that you could point to God.
- What is something that you have gone through in life, even if it was difficult, that you could use to help influence others to the gospel?
- Why is investing in relationships with others important for influence?
- How can our physical appearance affect our ability to influence others to serve God? (1 Tim. 2:9-10; 1 Pet. 3:1-6)

DO NOT WALK AS THE WORLD (EPH. 4:17-24)!

John Haffner

Paul uses “walk” repeatedly in Ephesians to describe one’s settled pattern of life—which is rooted in the mind, shaped by the desires of the heart, and expressed through ongoing behavior.

Out with the Old (Eph. 4:17-19)

- The Mind – Futility & Darkness (v. 17-18a)
 - Futility (vanity, folly): empty, purposeless thinking
 - Darkened understanding: moral blindness, not lack of intellect
 - Life apart from God begins with distorted thinking.
- The Heart – Separation & Hardness (v. 18b-19a)
 - Alienated: cut off from God’s life
 - Ignorance: willful moral blindness (not lack of opportunity, but resistance)
 - Blindness (a hardening): calloused, unresponsive heart
 - Rejected truth produces hardened affections
- The Behavior – Unrestrained Sin (v. 19b)
 - Given over: voluntary surrender
 - Lewdness: intemperance; shameless self-indulgence
 - Greediness: avarice; never satisfied
 - Corrupt living is the fruit, not the root

In with the New (Eph. 4:20-24)

- The Mind – Taught and Renewed in Christ (v. 20-21, 23)
 - Learned Christ: not just information, but submission and imitation
 - Truth is in Jesus: objective, embodied truth
 - Renewed mind: continual learning, as a disciple
 - Conversion begins with Christ-centered teaching that reshapes how we think.
- The Heart – A New Identity Formed (v. 22, 24a)
 - Old man: former self under sin’s rule
 - New man: new identity created by God
 - Put off / put on: represent a crucial allegiance shift at the very core of who we are
 - God not only changes who we are, but what we love and desire
- The Behavior – Godlike Living in Truth (v. 24b)
 - True: shaped and governed by revelation
 - Righteousness: right conduct toward others
 - Holiness: separated, devoted life toward God
 - Transformed living is patterned after the Lord who makes it possible

Conclusion

- Old Walk: Futile Mind → Hardened Heart → Corrupt Behavior
- New Walk: Renewed Mind → New Identity (Heart) → Righteous & Holy Living

For Further Study

- How does social media influence the mind, heart, and behavior of Christians? Identify potential positives and negatives.
- What are some warning signs that a member of the Lord's church may be developing a hardened heart?
- Read 1 Peter 4:1-6. How do these verses compare to Paul's message in Ephesians 4?
- Which part of the "old walk" is most subtly tolerated in modern views of Christianity?
- How could a congregation help young people to maintain a holy (distinct) walk without them becoming self-righteous or isolated?
- Read what was written to the church of Ephesus in Revelation 2:1-7. What specific steps can we take to ensure we do not "leave our first love" in modern times?
- Which area is most responsible when men and women of God drift away: wrong thinking, wrong desires, or wrong actions—and why?

I WILL WALK AMONG YOU (LEV. 26:12)!

Cody Westbrook

What greater blessing could be found than that of walking with God? Enoch walked with God (Gen. 5:24). Noah walked with God (Gen. 6:9). Abraham walked with God (Gen. 17:2) as a friend (Jas. 2:23). Moses spoke with the Lord as a man speaks to a friend (Exod. 33:11). The sentiment expresses a kind of intimate fellowship for which we all should strive (Ps. 42:1).

“Walking” is key concept in Leviticus 26. The term is found 10 times in the chapter, designating the way that Israel was to live. But it isn’t just Israel’s walk the text concerns itself with. Leviticus 26:12 promises, “I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be my people.

God’s Promise (Lev. 26:11-12)

The promise of Leviticus 26:11-12 is twofold. First, Jehovah promised to dwell among His people (Lev. 26:11). The word “Tabernacle” refers to a “tent” or “dwelling.” God desired a place of holiness by which He would dwell among His people, and thus He instructed, “And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them” (Exod. 25:8). That sanctuary was the tabernacle with all of its furnishings. In it the Lord met with Israel (Exod. 29:42-43) and spoke with them (Exod. 29:42). It was sanctified by His glory (Exod. 29:43-44), and its presence was a reminder to Israel that their God was among them (Exod. 29:45-46).

Entrance into the tabernacle, however, was limited. Not even Moses could do it (Exod. 40:34-38). God’s presence was among the people, but there was a sense in which it was not easily accessible. Thus the second promise, “I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be my people” (Lev. 26:12). To “walk among you” is literally, “to walk back and forth, up and down.” It is an expression of intimacy and relationship. Jehovah would bless, provide for, and protect His covenant people, and they would wear His name (Exod. 19:5-6; Deut. 28:10, etc.).

A Reminder (Lev. 26:13)

“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slaves; I have broken the bands of your yoke and made you walk upright.” This passage was intended to remind Israel of at least two truths. First, the blessing of fellowship with God as opposed to the burden of slavery. For years, Israel suffered under the burdensome yoke of Egyptian bondage, but the Lord redeemed them (Exod. 3:8-10; 6:6; 15:3). Now the benefits of being His people were theirs to enjoy. Second, the power and faithfulness of God. Great joy could be found in God’s promise to dwell and walk among His people, to be sure, but the promise wasn’t merely words. God’s power in securing their redemption was a sure testament to His ability to bring it to fruition.

Israel’s Responsibility (Lev. 26:14)

God’s promise to dwell and walk among His people was not without condition. Jehovah’s walk was dependent upon Israel’s walk. “If you walk in My statutes and keep my commandments, and perform them...” (Lev. 26:3). The whole of Leviticus 26 is a discussion of blessings and curses. Blessings upon obedience and curses upon

disobedience. The blessings of fellowship with God are innumerable, but each one depends upon our willingness to submit to His will.

Conclusion

Paul quotes Leviticus 26:11-12 in 2 Corinthians 6:14 as motivation for the Corinthians to pursue holiness. Like our 1st Century brethren, we live in an unholy world, covered in darkness. Yet we serve the same God and the truths of Leviticus 26 are just as applicable today as they were then. Our God desires fellowship with us and that fellowship—that relationship—is one of blessing, beyond description. But, like the Israelites and Corinthians, our holiness is a requirement.

For Further Study

- What is holiness?
- What are some practical examples of how holiness manifests itself in daily living?
- What blessings come from God walking with His people individually and collectively?
- What application can we draw from Leviticus 26 as a whole?

HELPING OTHERS TO WALK

Cody McCoy

Wise Walk – The Example of Christianity

A life of Christ-like integrity, honesty, and helpfulness is the foundational bridge that earns us the right to be heard. It creates the opportunities for the "discussion" part of our mission. This discussion of Colossians 4:5-6 is comprised of our "Wise Walk" (our drawing example) that leads to our "Wise Work" (the acts of evangelism) and "Wise Words" (the method of communication).

Wise Work – The Mission of Evangelism

"Wise Work" is defined as redeeming the time by taking advantage of every opportunity to share the gospel. Our Christ-like example will inevitably lead to questions, and we must be prepared to transition from a passive example to an active teacher.

The Process of Engagement:

- Don't pass up opportunities. When our integrity creates an opening, we must not make excuses out of fear or feelings of inadequacy. We must be ready to ask, "Would you like to know more?"
- Use a method. To gain competence and confidence, use a structured Bible study guide. This keeps the focus on the Scriptures and provides a clear path.
- Assess your audience. It is critical to determine their level of knowledge about God, Christ and the Bible.
 - If they claim to be a Christian. Start with an informal, gentle "interview" about their conversion. Ask key questions: Are you saved? What did you do to be saved? Were you baptized? Was it immersion? Were you saved before or after baptism? This helps establish their doctrinal foundation.
 - If they are unfamiliar with the Bible, you may first need to study the evidence for God's existence and the Bible's authority. If they don't see the Bible as authoritative, they will abandon the study.
- Count the cost. Be clear about the expectations of Christian life—attending services, growing, and laying aside sin.
- View conversion as relational, not transactional. Baptism is the starting line, not the finish line. The goal is Heaven. This requires continued study with new converts ("babes in Christ") through meals and study circles, helping them form relationships with many in the congregation.

Wise Words – The Method of Communication

"Wise Words" means letting our speech always be with grace. Both what we say and how we say it matters.

The Principles of Communication:

- Speak with grace. We must never compromise the truth, but we must not "smash" people with it. Tone of voice, volume, and body language all communicate. A harsh delivery will cause them to cancel the next study. We must discern what they can "bear" and build their knowledge foundation, just as Jesus did (John 16:12).

- Control the study. Do not get sidetracked by "chasing rabbits" (random "what about..." questions). He who asks the questions controls the study. Use the "building a house" analogy: we must build the foundation (Bible authority, sin, salvation) before we can put on the roof (Revelation).
- Balance patience with urgency: Do not beat around the bush, hoping your good example will "rub off" and save them. It won't. Our example only helps us be the person who shares the gospel. It is the gospel that is the power of God to salvation (Rom. 1:16).

Conclusion: The Authentic Answer

The world, especially the younger generation, is looking for authenticity, mentorship, and answers to life's greatest questions. The church can provide all of these. God uses us as the "laborers" to meet this need. The harvest is plentiful (Matt. 9:37), and we answer the call by combining our wise walk to work with wise words.

For Further Study

- What study method will I use to convert others (choose one and practice)?
- What scriptures command individual Christians to share the gospel?
- Does my life reflect the qualities of love listed in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (Do I suffer long? Am I patient? Am I kind? etc.)?
- Make a list of one person to convert, one to restore, and one to encourage. Pray for them and find opportunities to achieve the goal for each one.
- Commit to 2-3 ways to start evangelizing this month: social media, share a sermon, take someone a meal/cookies, start a study group, invite someone to services, etc.

PREPARING THEM TO RUN (PROV. 4:10-13)

Tom Moore

We don't want our children to be crawling or taking baby steps forever. We want them to grow strong and run! What do children need from parents to grow into strong, faithful Christian adults? How can we provide those things for them?

Introduction

"Train up a child in the way he should go, And even when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6).

- If you devote your time and energy to the training of a child, that training is going to shape that child's life in an indelible way.
- It is obvious to see that God places upon parents a grave obligation; shaping the destiny of children.

"Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings; And the years of thy life shall be many. I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in paths of uprightness. When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened; And if [when - KJV] thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble. Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: Keep her; for she is thy life" (Prov. 4:10-13).

- Basically, Solomon instructions his son to:
 - Listen
 - Run with stability
 - Hold fast to God's instruction
- How are parents to accomplish this goal with their children?

Edgar A. Guest wrote, "I'd rather see a sermon, than hear one any day; I'd rather one should walk with me, than merely show the way. The eye's a better pupil, and more willing than the ear; Sermons are confusing, but examples always clear."

Discussion

If you want our children grow strong and run toward a faithful Christian life, they will need to see at least ten things in your life:

- To hear you pray earnestly and often (1 Thess. 5:17)
- To spend time with you as you talk about the things of God (Deut. 6:6-9)
- To hear you talk with others about becoming Christians (Matt. 28:18-20)
- To see you put God first in your giving (Mal. 3:8-10)
- To watch you live a consistent Christian life (Deut. 10:12-13)
- To go with you to visit the unfortunate (Jas. 1:27)
- To hear you say good things about other Christians (1 Thess. 5:11)
- To be exposed to experiences that will bring Christian growth (1 Tim. 4:13-16)
- To see you love your spouse (Eph. 5:22-33)
- To hear you encourage their obedience (Acts 22:16)

Conclusion

No doubt, as a parent, you are thinking about preparing your children for life. You are thinking about their education, their finances, etc. But what are you doing to prepare them for eternity? It takes time, energy, and sound resources and this must be done with great diligence.

For Further Study

- How must time each day should we spend teaching our children the ways of God?
- What are some ways that we can work for the Lord together with our children?
- How can we use the situations around us to teach our children valuable spiritual lessons?
- How much television/screen time for a child is appropriate when compared with what is truly important in life?
- How much one-on-one time do you spend with your children each day?
- How can we make sure our children are “hanging around” with the proper influences?
- What are things our children must not be a part of to help them spiritually?
- What are things our children must be engaged in to help them spiritually?
- What can you do personally to help yourself be a better parent?
- What can you do to help yourself improve spiritually?

FOLLOWING IN THE RIGHT FOOTSTEPS

Caleb Nash

Influence is a very powerful thing. Salesmen use it to sell things to you, politicians use it to have you vote one way or another, parents use it to sway their kids in one way or another, and teachers use it to help you learn. Two of the ways influence takes place are through the avenues of friendship and example. A 2023 study in *Scientific Reports* found that adolescents tend to seek it from those in their friend group who they see as being trustworthy, competent, and smart. When they take in information from those individuals, it was found that there is a high likelihood they will follow their advice and model their behavior. The people they chose to let into their lives had a clear impact on their behavior.

The Bible speaks often and strongly about examples and influence. We must be careful who we let into our lives and what examples we are going to follow. Through the Bible, God commands us to follow good examples. We can break these examples into a few different categories. There is the Divine example, where we look at God and Jesus as an example for how we should live (Eph. 5:1, Phil. 2:5). Another category is Biblical examples aside from the Divine. Paul tells us on multiple occasions to follow his example (1 Cor. 11:1, Phil. 3:17). In addition to Paul and the apostles, we also have a large number of people we can look to in the Bible that serve as positive examples for us as followers of God. A quick reading of Hebrews 11 reveals many good examples of faithfulness for us to learn from and follow. The third category is modern Christian examples. Paul tells us, in addition to following his example, to follow those who also walk like him, and follow them both, as a pattern. A valuable thing we can gain from this is that we can also look to those around us in the Church for good examples to follow. Thankfully, and by no mistake, Christians have many positive sources when it comes to seeking positive influence.

There are also many negative influences in the world, which we can also break into a couple of categories. The first negative category is, again, biblical examples. There are nearly limitless examples of people who have done the wrong thing, but let's consider a few times when people were influenced to do so. Rehoboam was a man who let young and unwise counsel sway them, which resulted in the division of a nation (1 Kings 12:1-19). We remember that Adam and Eve were deceived by a serpent and made a decision that would negatively affect every human after them, because they could no longer dwell in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3). King Ahab once listened to a lying majority of people, a decision that would end in his death (1 Kings 22:5-28). We can also recall in the New Testament how the Galatians were led astray by false teachers and needed to be corrected (Gal. 1:6-9). There certainly are many dangerous influences in the world, and we must beware.

We must be diligent to guard ourselves from bad examples and try to follow good ones. So then, how can we know whether someone is providing a good example or not? There are three tests we can use. The first is the word test, which refers to what they say. Do they claim to follow Jesus? Do they claim to rightly divide the truth and know God's Word (2 Tim. 2:15)? The second test is the works test. When you look at the things they choose to do, are their actions aligned with the Scriptures (1 Cor. 10:31, Col. 3:17)? Finally, the third test is the fruits test. This looks at the results of their

actions and sees if they bring forth good fruit. Their fruit will reveal who they are (Matt. 7:15-20). Do they show the fruit of the spirit (Gal. 5:22)? Do you want the same results that they have found (Heb. 13:7)? You can use these tests to determine whether those around you are good examples or bad ones. In addition to these tests, the questions below can be very helpful as well.

- Good Examples
 - Divine
 - Eph. 5:1 - “Be imitators of God as dear children.”
 - Phil. 2:5 - “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”
 - 1 Cor. 11:1 - “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.”
 - Also notice: John 13:5, 1 Pet. 2:21, 1 John 2:6
 - Biblical
 - 1 Cor. 11:1 - “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.”
 - Heb. 11 - “by faith...” examples.
 - Phil. 3:17 - “Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.”
 - Modern
 - Phil. 3:17 - “Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.”
 - Heb. 3:7 - “whose faith follow” (NKJV) or “imitate their faith” (LSB). Likely talking about elders.
- Bad Examples
 - Biblical
 - 1 Kings 12:1-19 - Rehoboam let bad advice influence him.
 - Gen. 3:1-6 - Eve listened to the serpent.
 - 1 Kings 22:5-28 - Ahab listened to the majority.
 - Gal. 1:6-9 - The Galatians listened to false teachers.
 - Modern
 - Family
 - Friends
 - Co-workers
 - The Internet
- Identifying Examples
 - Word Test
 - Do they claim to follow Jesus?
 - 2 Tim. 2:15 - Does what they say align with the Scriptures?
 - Works Test
 - Do their actions align with the Scriptures?
 - 1 Cor. 10:31
 - Col. 3:17
 - Fruit Test
 - Do their results align with what they say?
 - Matt. 7:15-20 - You shall know them by their fruits.
 - Gal. 5:22 - Do they show the fruit of the spirit?
 - Heb. 13:7 - See where their actions have led them, and if you want to follow.

For Further Study

- How have people influenced you in your life, whether friends, family, coworkers, or people online?
- Have you intentionally tried to follow the Divine example of God and Jesus?
- Think about your most positive and negative influences. Which people have characteristics that are most like Christ's?
- Do you actually take time to think about who to let into your life, and whether they will be good for you?
- Have you chosen to let people in your life who will help you or hurt you? Should you change your choices?
- If you have let worldly people into your life, hoping to influence them, who has influenced whom the most?
- How have you influenced the people around you? Which category do you fit into?

HELPING THOSE WHO STOP WALKING

Carl McCann

“Sadly, some Christians leave the faith.”

Upon receiving my assignment these six words stuck out! I immediately began to remember the names and faces of those I personally know who have stopped walking in the light choosing rather to walk in darkness (1 John 1:5-7). Countless excuses have been offered to justify such an inexcusable choice. Others don't even bother with an excuse, just a stubborn refusal to follow the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6). Consider a few thoughts from the book of James as we try to reach out to help those who have stopped walking.

Understand the possibility of someone stopping walking. “Brethren, if anyone among you should wander from the truth...” (Jas. 5:19a). When one becomes a Christian, by obeying the Gospel, they must also be aware of the terrible enemy who is determined to destroy them (1 Pet. 5:8). God created mankind with the ability to choose. With that ability comes the possibility of choosing wrong (Josh. 24:15). While on earth Jesus encountered those who stopped walking (John 6:66-71) and sadly we will encounter the same.

Realize our responsibility to help our erring brethren to return. “... and someone turns him back” (Jas. 5:19b). Earlier attention was called to those who wander or err from the truth. Perhaps looking at an Old Testament passage will help us understand how grave their situation is. Consider - “Then Cain went out from the presence of the Lord and dwelt in the land of Nod (literally Wandering) on the east of Eden” (Gen. 4:16). How many once faithful brethren are now living in the land of wandering? Are you willing to be that “someone” who helps turn an erring brother back to the Way of truth?

Getting a hold on the troubles. The book of James begins with a discussion of troubles or trials that brethren will face. “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience” (Jas. 1:2-3). Trials in life come in a myriad of ways. Knowing this to be true, brethren need to prepare themselves for the uncertain difficulties of life. We need to remind ourselves and others, especially those who have turned away, of the beauty of Scripture - “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28). One's reaction to the trials of life is crucial to spiritual survival.

Examine the situation clearly. While the trials (difficulties of life) can help perfect our faith, James also warns of temptations which can draw one away. Temptation is real. It comes when least expected, but is no less damaging. James again informs us that when one wanders and is turned back - “know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death...”(Jas. 5:20). Sin is a trap! For years I've taught that sin will take you farther than you wanted to go, keep you longer than you intended to stay and cost you more than you intended to pay. However, recently another thought has been added: sin will teach you more than you wanted to know! To the erring Christian please come home (Luke 15:11-32).

Nurture with the noblest of words. Our aim in reaching the wayward Christian is to “cover a multitude of sins” (James 5:20c). In this effort words will be necessary. Words of correction, remembrance and exhortation. Paul reminds us to “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one” (Col. 4:6). Further, Jesus would say, “...whatever you want men to do to you, you also do to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 7:15). Truly, the “Golden Rule” is priceless in our efforts to speak words of exhortation, correcting those who are in error.

Take care of the responsibility. In closing, let’s note James’ thoughts in totality. “Brethren, if anyone among you should wander from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins” (Jas. 5:19-20). Do I love the erring enough to be a “someone?” Eternal destiny hangs in the answer to the foregoing question, not just for the erring but for the unwilling. Remember Paul’s charge - “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1).

May the Lord help us to be mindful of those who have stopped walking.

For Further Study

- Name some of the causes for faithful Christians to stop walking.
- In what ways can I help those who have fallen away? How grateful am I that I am faithful?
- Discuss how the parable of the Prodigal Son is applicable to our topic?
- How can the example of faithfulness in Hebrews 11 encourage those who have stopped walking?
- Does a proper view of trials help me in this life to remain faithful to God? Discuss.

WALK IN THE LIGHT (1 JOHN 1:1-10)

John Baker

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

Every Christian can know and experience the blessed assurance of salvation in Christ!

- Assurance is a matter of the **truthfulness of the gospel** (1 John 1:1-4). The gospel of Christ is a historically verifiable reality (1 John 1:1-4). The apostles were chosen to be eyewitnesses of Christ (Acts 1:8) who joyfully proclaimed what they had seen and heard (1 John 1:1-3; Acts 4:19-20; 2 Pet. 1:16-19). Do we joyfully embrace the gospel message as revealed by the apostles?
- Assurance is also a matter of **our fellowship with God and His people** (1 John 1:3-4, 7). Much of 1 John is devoted to arguing that we cannot truly have fellowship with God without also recognizing and loving the people of God, the church (1 John 2:9-11; 3:10-18; 4:20-21). Are God and His people precious to us?
- Assurance is also a matter of **walking in the light** (1 John 1:5-10). Because God is light (v.5), His people must also “walk in the light” (v.7). Those who do so enjoy the benefits of fellowship and the cleansing blood of Christ. Do we truly believe the tremendous promises contained in 1 John 1:5-10?

Despite the Bible’s teaching about assurance, many Christians still struggle to believe and accept the truth that God really has forgiven them. Carefully reflect on the following questions:

Why Do Christians Sometimes Struggle to Know God’s Forgiveness?

- We may be in denial about our sin (1 John 1:8, 10).
- We may be inadequately informed (Heb. 8:12).
- We may believe that forgiveness must be earned (1 John 1:8-10; Eph. 2:8-10).
- We may be struggling with habitual sin (Col. 3:5-8).
- We may be overcome with guilt because of past sins (Matt. 27:3-10; 1 Tim. 1:12-16).
- We may be holding on to bitterness and anger toward another (Eph. 4:31-32).
- We may be enduring great trials or chronic suffering (John 9:1-5).
- We may have been listening to strong preaching or teaching (2 Tim. 4:2; 2 Cor. 13:5).

What Principles Will Help Christians Better Appreciate God’s Forgiveness?

- Trust the ability of Jesus (1 John 1:7) – there is soul-cleansing power in His blood.
- Trust the faithfulness of God (1 John 1:9).
- Every time we confess, He is faithful to forgive.
- Trust the work of Christ – justice has been done (1 John 1:9).
- Every time we confess, He is just to forgive.

For Further Study

- Study Mark 2:1-12. Why did Jesus heal the瘫痪者? What was He proving? (hint: look especially at verse 10)
- Based on the Bible's teaching about forgiveness, which comes first: belief (based on God's Word) that we are forgiven or the feeling that we are forgiven?
- How would you counsel someone who is struggling against habitual sin? What hope and encouragement can God's Word give them?
- How would you counsel someone who is overcome with guilt because of a sinful past? What hope and encouragement does God's Word give?

PROTECTING OUR FEET (PROV. 6:20-35)

KJ Moore

How can you, as a godly person, protect your feet from the dangers of sin?

Heed the Counsel of the Wise (v. 20-24)

The text contrasts the wise, godly words of the recipient's parents and the smooth-talking deceit of the adulteress. Given that God is the author of wisdom (Prov. 1:7), paying careful attention to both His words and the words of those who follow Him is essential for godliness. We cannot expect to stand fast against sin if we do not listen to wise warnings against it.

See that Looks are Deceiving (v. 25-26)

Solomon here compares the value of the adulteress and the value of her victim. Because of her spiritually rebellious actions, she is not even worth more than bread. Her prey, however, is precious; she seeks after the valuable game of an innocent yet unwise person. As is especially true in the cases of lust and adultery (Matt. 5:28), sin looks appealing yet hosts perilous pitfalls (Gen. 3:6). The beauty of the adulteress masks the ugliness of adultery, and the appeals of sin conceal its dangers.

Flee Needless Spiritual Hazards (v. 27-29)

Events like mountain climbing and wild land firefighting host both objective and subjective hazards. The former hazards are unavoidable risks that figuratively and literally come with the territory, like the natural risk of death, but the latter ones are avoidable. One should never put themselves in needless danger, and the same is spiritually true. Scripture teaches that pursuing actions that are objectively destructive is as foolish as being recklessly close to fire.

Agree That Sin is Never Justified (v. 30-32)

Solomon notes that, while people sympathize with the thief who steals for the sake of his hunger, thievery is worthy of punishment no matter its rationale. He then says that the same is true of adultery. When we sin, we tend to rationalize and justify our misdeeds, ignoring that sin is never right. Avoiding sin requires seeing it in its proper light, and facing consequences that may arise.

Be Wary of Spiritual Culpability (v. 33-35)

Solomon states that the adulterer's life is one of shame and disgrace. Sin innately bears personal and interpersonal consequences; there is no such thing as "private" sin in a sense. God is always aware of our actions and, when other people become aware, their desire for vengeance is at least understandable. No matter what you do to try and fix it, sinful actions can have lingering consequences that are difficult to erase. While we ought to be thankful for our freedom from sin in Jesus Christ, we should never assume that we will escape its repercussions.

For Further Study

- Why do we often fail to heed godly advice, and what can we do to be more receptive?
- What makes sin attractive to us? Name some specific examples and why they tempt us.
- How do godly people in the Bible deal with temptation (e.g., Joseph, Jesus, etc.)?
- What are other, specific examples of sins that we rationalize? Are those reasons valid?
- Because we are forgiven in Christ, is it wrong to think about the consequences of sin?

WALKING WITH BALANCE (ECCLES. 3:1)

Dave Rogers

Biblical balance is a state of equilibrium or stability between the interests that compete for our attention and energy. Achieving harmony in our often too-busy lives remains an elusive goal for many Christians. Families, friends, jobs, hobbies, health, God, and many other things compete for time and attention, and it's easy to allow one to diminish or crowd out the others.

Biblical balance is not simply a “well-rounded” life.

- It speaks of a life set in order, prioritized to honor God in all these areas (Eccles. 3:1-11).
- The idea of “a time for everything” is not the same as “everything at once, all the time.”
- The world’s “have it all” philosophy produces mediocrity in everything, but excellence in nothing – God’s children should strive to be excellent Christians, (2 Tim. 2:15)!

An out-of-balance life produces unhappy results.

- Satan encouraged Eve to distrust God (Gen. 3:4-6; cf. 1 Tim. 2:14); her discontent led to loss of fellowship with Him.
- Esau’s physical hunger led him to despise and discard his birthright, which he later regretted (Gen. 25:29-34, cf. Heb. 12:17).
- King Saul’s arrogant egotism resulted in the loss of his kingdom (1 Sam. 13, 15, 19).
- A moment’s lust guided king David into sins that produced continual strife throughout his life (2 Sam. 11-12).
- Judas’ greed (John 12:4-6) led him to betray the Lord Jesus (John 6:71, 13:21, 26-28; cf. Matthew 26:14-16, 27:5).

Balance is not only an individual responsibility.

- These principles also apply in the home, workplace, community, and especially the church.
- “Home” is to revolve around the husband and wife, not the children (Eph. 6:1-2).
- A congregation who do not share “one mind” toward God (Phil. 2:2) is in danger (Rev. 2:5).

Balance insures stability and facilitates contentment.

- Contentment is a learned quality (Phil. 4:11), not an inherent trait.
- Note also 1 Timothy 6:6, 8 and Hebrews 13:5.
- Learning to cooperate is part of achieving balance (Eccles. 4:9-11; Mark 6:7).
- This is one of the lessons of the “body” images of the church in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12.

The ability and willingness to look beyond a moment of stress or frustration and focus on the “big picture” of responsibilities and potential consequences separates the balanced person from the double-minded man of James 1:6-8 (“unstable in all his ways”). When Belshazzar was “weighed...and found wanting” (Dan. 5:27), Jezebel was “given time to repent” (Rev. 2:20-23), and Paul wrote of those who would love pleasure more than they loved God (2 Tim. 3:4), achieving a balanced life would have necessitated change.

Walking with biblical balance is a matter of arranging all the competing aspects of our lives so that God is honored in each of them.

For Further Study

- Solomon wrote of “a time for every purpose” (Eccles. 3:1) – how can we determine the “right” times for the important events of our lives?
- What are some ways Christians can effectively insulate ourselves against the world’s focus on trying to “have it all?”
- How much time do you think is “enough” time for repentance (cf. Rev. 2:5)?
- Strong emotions can cloud our ability to reason clearly (Jas. 1:20). How do we balance accurate biblical reasoning with the strong emotions various situations can arouse?
- Temptation is Satan’s attempt to throw us off balance with the idea that we can satisfy a legitimate, God-created desire in an illegitimate way. What are some ways of preventing those desires from distracting us from faithfulness to Christ?
- Congregations don’t fail or apostatize overnight. What are some factors to consider when we seek to correct or mature an erring congregation (Heb. 5:12-14)?
- What things would you identify as danger signs of an unbalanced Christian walk?
- In a culture with a history of personal independence and “rugged self-reliance,” what are some things Christians can do to foster a willingness to cooperate with and depend on one another?

WALKING IN A WORLD OF IDOLATRY

Alex Simmons

Often when it comes to the subject of idolatry, many consider it to be an ancient issue. After all, it was in the ages of antiquity that wooden images were craved, and golden figures were made. It was commonplace to find “household idols” (Judg. 17:5) in the homes of the ancients, but today that practice is few and far between. With this being the case, it is no surprise we often view idolatry as an issue of long ago, but we need to recognize idolatry is just as prevalent today as it was in the past! With that in mind, let us consider several things regarding this serious and spiritual topic.

3 Areas to consider regarding idolatry:

What Scripture says

- The Biblical definition for idolatry is found in Exodus 20:3-6.
- Idolatry is one of the most condemned sins in Scripture (Lev. 19:4; Col. 3:5; Gal. 5:20).
- Anyone can fall victim to the sin of idolatry (1 Cor. 10:12).
 - Aaron (Exod. 32:1, 2)
 - Solomon (1 Kings 11:6, 7)
 - Judas (Matt. 26:14-16)

What God thinks

- God says idolatry is useless (Isa. 44:9-20).
- God says idolatry cannot save (Judg. 10:14).
- God says idolatry will cost you your soul (1 Cor. 6:9, 10).

What I should do

- We need to flee from idolatry (1 Cor. 10:14).
- We need to abhor idolatry (Rom. 12:9; Ps. 97:10).
- We need to examine ourselves to make sure we are not practicing idolatry (2 Cor. 13:5; Hag. 1:5).

For Further Study:

- Am I giving more time to sports, social media, and extra-curricular activities than I am to God (Eph. 5:16)?
- Do I choose to go on school trips, vacation, or attend a sporting event rather than worship (Heb. 10:24, 25)?
- Am I more emotionally invested in secular things than spiritual things (Matt. 6:33)?
- What are some things that can become idols in my life (Col. 3:5)?
- If God were to examine my life, would He say I have problem with idolatry (2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 21:8)?

WALKING IN UNITY (AMOS 3:3)

Trent Kennedy

Christian unity is a precious thing. It was the subject of Jesus' prayer (John 17:21). Unity under the name of Christ is a cornerstone of New Testament Christianity (1 Cor. 1:10). Jesus died for a unified body (Col. 3:15). The church is to work as a unified body (1 Cor. 12:12-31). When brethren dwell together in unity, the Bible calls it good (Ps. 133:1). Unity was the aim of the first-century church (Eph. 4:13). It is a worthy cause (Eph. 4:1-3). When someone breaks unity, worldly wisdom is being exercised, and evil is accomplished (Jas. 3:16). The Lord hates when someone sows discord among brethren (Prov. 6:19). In fact, those who cause divisions among unified brethren are to be marked and avoided (Rom. 16:17).

Christian unity, simply expressed, is being "one." No matter the differences, Christians are "one in Christ Jesus" without their own individual, segregating identities (Gal. 3:28). When brethren are unified, they share one mind (Phil. 2:2; 2 Cor. 13:11; 1 Pet. 3:8). They speak the same thing and have the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10). They share a single heart, soul, and purpose (Acts 4:32). They make peace a priority (Rom. 12:18, 14:19). They work together as one (Rom. 12:4-8).

Sometimes, it can help to understand a concept by clearly identifying what it is not. Unity is not simply a union. Nearness, togetherness, closeness, and compromise do not make up the fundamentals of Biblical unity. Amos asked Israel a question, "Shall two walk together, except they have agreed?" (Amos 3:3). This question is actually the first in a series of five related questions (Amos 3:3-6). Each of these questions is meant to be easily answered by the audience with a resounding "no." What makes these questions unique is that the observable effect demands the preceding cause. In vs. 3, the effect is that two are walking together. The cause then is clear and necessary: they have agreed. This is a powerful statement for the application of Christian unity: foundational and fundamental agreement is necessary to walk together.

Further, it demands that we ask the question: upon what shall we have fundamental and foundational agreement? The answer here is simpler than our world postulates. Biblical unity is based in God. We must acknowledge his sovereignty (Heb. 11:6). We must give his Word the foundation in our hearts that it might be the sole platform for unity (Deut. 4:2; Ps. 119:74; 1 Cor. 4:6). It is the Spirit's unity (Eph. 4:3). God's Word is the only possible place for Christian unity to begin (John 17:17).

Practically speaking, how can unity be accomplished? The answer is found in a study of Ephesians 4:1-6. Unity can be achieved only when brethren bring the correct attitude to the table. Brethren can walk in unity when they view themselves with humility and their brethren with patience (Eph. 4:1-2). However, attitude is not enough. Brethren can walk together in unity when they exert diligent effort to preserve peace (Eph. 4:3). It requires work. Finally, brethren can only walk together in unity when they are unified in doctrine (Eph. 4:4-6). When brethren are not of the same mind doctrinally, there can only be a cheap substitute for unity, even if it is labeled as such.

What threatens Christian unity? While the answers could vary greatly, it seems to me that the threats would be the opposite of the needs of Christian unity. If we were to work backwards through Ephesians 4:1-6, we would observe that doctrinal difference is a threat to unity. Human opinion, tradition, conjecture, and assumption cannot hold the same tier as God-revealed doctrine. There is only one God, one baptism, one church, one hope, one faith, one Lord, one Spirit. When we cannot stand unified on the Scriptures about these things, unity cannot exist. But, unity requires more than doctrinal agreement: it requires effort and attitude. Without hard work, humility, and long-suffering, unity cannot be upheld. Laziness, haughtiness, and hastiness will break unity just as quickly as doctrinal disputes. Biblically, all of these are important, and brethren who minimize any of them are not leaning on God for understanding the topic of unity (Prov. 3:5-6).

We know that these threats to unity exist among the brotherhood, in our congregations, and maybe even in our own hearts. Yet, the Scriptures teach that these threats can be overcome. While Ephesians 4:1-6 serves as a blueprint for overcoming these threats to unity, a partially parallel passage in Colossians 3:1-17 could further our understanding. It is in this text that we can see how to overcome the threats to unity:

- Perspective for Unity: Heaven (v. 1-4)
- Personal Morality for Unity: New Man (v. 5-10)
- Priority for Unity: Oneness (v. 11)
- Preference for Unity: My Brethren (v. 12-14)
- Perfection for Unity: Love (v. 15)
- Platform for Unity: Word of Christ (v. 16-17)

From this text, we see that unity begins and ends with God. Our shared faith in Christ, based on the truth of his Word, is the only foundation that we can walk together on and have true unity. But, overcoming threats to unity demands that each one of us make personal purity as important as doctrinal purity. Biblical unity demands that I value how I treat and view my brethren as just as important as what they believe. Can we have unity without shared belief? No. Can we have unity if Biblical love does not guide my actions and desire to be unified? No.

Biblical unity must be based on the authority of Scripture as the singular reality of doctrine, faith, and practice. Next, Biblical unity requires me to do everything in my power to foster, preserve, and restore unity. If every Christian were to practice these things, we would be of the same mind and same judgment, teaching the same thing, and we would walk together in precious unity. Christian unity was worthy of Jesus praying for and dying for. Brethren, it is worth us fighting for!

For Further Study:

- Can brethren who are living in sin have unity with God or one another (1 John 1:5-10)?
- What doctrine can be compromised to preserve unity (2 John 9-11)?
- What matter of opinion, judgment, or expediency is worth compromising the unity of the faith (Rom. 14:1-23)?
- Do I want to be unified with all my brethren? Or, do I like that some brethren are walking astray because it helps to highlight that I am right or better (Phil. 2:1-3)?
- How can I show love towards brethren to prioritize unity (Col. 3:12-15)?

WALK BY FAITH (2 COR. 5:7)

Mike Vestal

Outline 1 - Focusing On the Verse Itself - 2 Corinthians 5:7

- The Connection Made - “For”
- The Activity Mentioned - “We walk”
- The Contrast Stated - “By faith” or “By sight”
- The Caution Implied - They don’t necessarily mix well!

Outline 2 - Focusing On the Verse in Context - 2 Corinthians 5:1-10

- The Next Life is Better (v. 1)
- The Next Life is Perfect (v. 2-4)
- The Next Life is Assured (v. 5)
- The Next Life Gives us Encouragement in the Present (v. 6-8)
- The Next Life Gives us Incentive in the Present (v. 9-10)

For Further Study

- How does this passage beautifully balance the “already” and “not yet” of the Christian life?
- What are all the contrasts noted in 5:1-10? Carefully observe them.
- How does the apostle Paul’s life illustrate the truths being conveyed? List specific ways.
- Count the number of references to “we” in 2 Corinthians 5. How many did you find? Why is this important?
- In what areas are you personally tempted to walk more by “sight” than by “faith?” How might this passage in its entirety be prayed back to God to provide strength and help?
- Show the remarkably God-centered nature of 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 by observing every reference to God, the Holy Spirit and the Lord.
- In 1 sentence, what is the “heart” of this passage? How might one explain it to a child?
- How might the meaning of this passage be applied: (1) to one outside of Christ? (2) to a Christian who has wandered away? (3) to a high school youth group? (4) to a Ladies’ Bible class? (5) to someone who is grieving the loss of a faithful Christian spouse, child or parent?