

WALK WHOLLY LIKE CHRIST

Summary and Historical Background

Paul continues his discussion of the life that Christians are to live. Chapter five describes the walk of a Christian as pure and precise. The purity of life expected of a Christian is described as a Walk by children of light (5:14). Real purity of mind and act in the ancient world was rare. Socrates, though he challenged the intellectual and moral life of Athens, was a homosexual. Augustus, who strove to promote family life and virtue, heartlessly divorced (without grounds) and remarried whenever he thought that such action was expedient for his empire. The darkness of the ancient world (in moral ignorance, moral rebellion, and moral perversity) was to be shunned by believers as they imitated the purity of the light of God.

Paul then calls believers to a circumspect walk, a walk which is precise and meets the standards of God's Word even to the smallest detail of life (5:15). The command, "Be filled with the Spirit," is an important aspect of a walk that is precise. Four participles describe the manifestation of Spirit-filling: speaking, singing and making melody, giving thanks, and submitting. Paul gives special attention to submission at the end of chapter five (5:22-33). He explains how it is evidenced between man and wife. Chapter six concludes his discussion of submission (6:1-9).

I. Walk in Love — 5:1-7

5:1-2 — These verses sum up the last section on the wrong walk (4:17-32). Instead of the self-centered attitude of the unsaved, our lives are to be lived with a Christ centered attitude.

"Be therefore followers of God" — the verb "be" is better translated "become." Growth in Christ is a matter of continual development.

When we perfect one aspect of our lives, God will often show us a new area where we need to become like Him. The word, "followers" is the word from which we get "mimic."

"As dear children" — literally it says, "as beloved children." Because we are God's beloved children, we should imitate Him. We should be like children who love their parents and strive to imitate them and please them.

"Has given Himself" — love always gives sacrificially. The terms "offering" and "sacrifice" include the whole range of the offerings - bloody (animal) and unbloody (vegetable).

"For a sweet-smelling savor" — this phrase suggests the acceptability of Christ's sacrifice and the substitutionary nature of His sacrifice (Lev 1:9; 4:31).

5:3 — Now Paul speaks of the erotic love of unbelievers that is not condoned by true believers.

"Fornication" — this word includes every kind of sexual sin (pornography, adultery, homosexuality, intercourse between unmarried persons). Sexual sin was regarded as a matter of moral indifference, indulged in by both the leaders (kings and philosophers) and their people.

"Let it not be once named" — God's children are to be so separated from sin that no practice of it is suspected of them. Christians must not even enjoy talking about the wicked practices of the world.

"As becomes saints" — immoral speech and action are to be avoided since these things are not appropriate for saints.

5:4 — Paul discusses specific sins of the tongue and gives the proper use of the tongue by a Christian.

"Filthiness" — this word describes coarse, immoral, ungodly talk.

"Foolish talking" — this is silly talk that makes light of spiritual truth, like the talk of a drunkard.

"Jesting" — this word refers to jokes about immoral sexual behavior. This talk can be vulgar and coarse, but it also can be witty and spoken beautifully, amusing a cultured person of the world.

"Thanks" — the attitude and words of believers are to be altogether different, characterized by thankfulness.

5:5 — "No . . . inheritance in the Kingdom" - Paul names three groups of people that will not be in the Kingdom of Christ and of God. Who are these people? First, the ones who are sexually immoral will not be in the Kingdom of Christ. They may profess to be saved, but Jesus does not save people and leave them in their sins; He saves people and delivers them from their sins. If a person defends his or her immoral sexual behavior, he may enjoy it for now, but will suffer in Hell forever. Second, the ones who are unclean will not enter Christ's Kingdom. They are unclean in their hearts and will express it in their words. Jesus said, "Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks" (Mt 12:34). A person with an unclean heart needs to repent and be cleansed by the blood of Jesus. Third, the ones who are covetous are idolaters and will have no part in Christ's Kingdom. They love the things in this world, which are their idols. Christ will not let them into His Kingdom.

5:6 — "Because of these things comes the wrath of God" - the present tense shows that God always judges sin. God condemns man on the basis of actual sin committed.

5:7 — "Do not be partakers with them" - the word "partakers" is used of joint owners. "Be" can be translated "become." Believers are not to become involved with the works of darkness.

II. Walk in Holiness — 5:8-14

5:8 — Paul reminds the Ephesians that their lives once were involved in these things, but now they are light. They share the divine nature, the nature of which John said, "God is light." Because of their new standing Paul says, "Walk as children of light." The verb means to walk continually, or do the things that are consistent with their standing as children of light.

5:9 — "For the fruit of the Spirit" - this phrase implies that we have the Holy Spirit indwelling us. The life produced by the Spirit has three characteristics:

(1) Goodness: this is behavior which is good and fitting, morally upright in personal character.

(2) Righteousness: this is behavior which is according to God's standard. Right social dealings are implied.

(3) Truth: sincerity and integrity, opposed to falsehood and hypocrisy, are seen in this word. Such truth is the ruling principle of a believer's life.

(NOTE: Many old manuscripts have "fruit of light" for "fruit of the Spirit." If this reading is preferred, then the three characteristics listed above are the products of light.)

5:10 — "Proving what is acceptable" - rather "testing" (Rom 12:2) to see what is "well-pleasing" to God. Such testing implies continual, diligent activity and energy to examine what is good, i.e., what meets with God's approval and delight.

5:11 — "And have no fellowship" - Paul has mentioned two responses to darkness. Believers are not to be partakers (partners) with the workers of sin (5:7). Here the command is to have no fellowship with the works of sin. They are to avoid any personal interest in the works of darkness and keep away from any intimate ties with them. Instead, they are to reprove them - orally rebuke them (as in a legal brief or a courtroom argument), showing the shame of these sins.

5:12 — "For it is a shame even to speak of those things" - this does not mean that believers are to refrain from rebuking a sinner about these secret sins since they are too shameful to mention. The idea is rather that these sins are obnoxious to believers, and when they must reprove them, it is repulsive.

5:13 — "But all things" - the point is simple. The light clearly shows the hidden things just as reproofs from God's children expose sin. Sinners are seen to be what they truly are when reproved by the children of light.

5:14 — "Wherefore he says" - Paul is freely paraphrasing Isaiah 60:1 (perhaps early Christians had a chorus or hymn based on Isa 60:1 which Paul quotes here).

"Christ shall give you light" — the verb "give light" is often used of the dawn of the new day. When a pagan turns to Christ from his "sleep" in sin, a new day will dawn in his life, and will bring him out of his former ignorance and wickedness.

III. Walk in Wisdom — 5:15-33

5:15 — "See then that ye walk circumspectly" - "circumspect" means "look about; be careful; be exact." It takes in all the facts before acting, so it is walking wisely. Related words were used (1) of manuscripts which were identical to the one from which they were copied; (2) of ships which were in the highest degree of perfection; (3) of bank accounts which balanced to the last penny; and (4) of an investigation which left no stone unturned. This word suggests care and accuracy in obedience even in the smallest detail. Paul gives various details concerning the relationship in the believer's family and also in his workplace. These principles must be carefully observed in all areas of his personal life.

Two possible word orders exist here. The first would be translated, "See carefully how you are walking" - investigate carefully all the details of your life to see if they are as God would have them. The second would read, "See how exactly you are walking" - see if you are walking exactly as God's Word commands. Either word order will lead you to walk wisely.

5:16 — "Redeeming the time" - literally, "buying up the opportunity." Believers are to make every opportunity of service for Christ their very own.

5:17 — "Be not unwise" - another way the believer can make that his precise pattern of Scripture is to "become (literally) not unwise." He must not go back to folly, but understand the will of the Lord. In the Greek, the word "to understand" originally meant "to join together." Such understanding joins together the mental comprehension with the practical expression. God's will is to be known and done.

5:18 — "And be not drunk with wine" - the abuse of wine is forbidden, since it leads to excess - an abandoned, debauched, lecherous, riotous life.

"But be filled with the Spirit" — the Spirit does not refer to man's spirit, but to the Holy Spirit. Paul contrasts the two states: the elevation caused by drunkenness and the elevation caused by the Spirit. The filling of the Spirit is mentioned in connection with several functions: (1) special enablement for service (Ex 31:3; Acts 9:17); (2) special enablement for testimony (Acts 4:8, 31); and (3) special enablement to meet temptation (Lk 4:1) or persecution (Acts 7:55). Note, however, that this act of filling is not some extraordinary blessing for which a believer yearns or achieves by fasting. It is not a promise to be claimed. This verse is a command to be obeyed. But how can a passive command be obeyed? Believers are not to let wine control them, but rather they are to let the Spirit control them. The Spirit will do the work that pleases the Father. The following verses have four participles which describe the manifestation of the Spirit when He is in control of the believer.

5:19-21 — "Speaking to yourselves in psalms" - the first test of a Spirit-controlled person is, "What does he talk about?" The phrase refers to spiritual conversation: he speaks about spiritual things. The psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs can include Gospel songs and choruses as well as hymns and canonical Psalms. Believers should regularly, habitually, discuss spiritual truths with each other.

"Singing and making melody in your heart to God" — the second test of a Spirit-controlled person is, "What does he think about?" "In your heart" definitely refers to inward meditation on the Word of God and to inward worship. "Singing and making melody" reveals an attitude of delight and joy in his contemplation.

"Giving thanks always for all things" — the third test of Spirit-filling in a believer is, "How does he react to adverse circumstances?" This phrase shows that he has a thankful spirit even in the difficult times (Rom 8:28).

"Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God" — the last test is, "How does he obey orders?" The word, "submit," comes from the words "to arrange under." There is always the need for leadership and obedience. Both acts and attitudes are to be submissive, since all submission is governed by the "fear of God." There is no mandate for submission when the human leader is wrong.

However, disobedience to human authority in order to obey God's Word must never be done lightly. Humility, willingness to state the principle, and willingness to suffer for righteousness' sake are needed when a decision is made to oppose man's authority in order to obey God's authority. In summary, the four manifestations for filling are: (1) continual, ready conversation about the word of God, (2) continual meditation on spiritual things, (3) continual thanksgiving for everything; and (4) continual submission to designated human authorities as governed by "the fear of God."

5:22-24 — Paul first deals with the wives' need to submit to their own husbands. The husband holds the position of head of the wife in the marriage, as Christ is head of the church. So wives need to be submissive and obedient in everything (except, of course, what violates Christ's commands).

5:25 — Paul now tells the husbands how to "submit" to their wives "in the fear of God." The husband's role in the divine order is to love his wife. This love is the way he expresses his "submission." The Bible knows nothing about mutual submission in a marriage. Biblically the husband is always the leader, but this leadership does not mean dictatorship. Harshness has no part in a marriage (Col 3:19). The husband's love is exemplified, "as Christ loved the church." Such love is a self-sacrificing love. Three actions of Christ's love are described in 5:25-26:

"And gave Himself for her" — this phrase refers to Christ's past work of love by dying for sin.

5:26 — "That He might sanctify it" - Christ's present work of love is His work as High Priest, interceding for believers and separating them from the daily defilement of sin.

"And cleanse it" — Christ's present work also includes cleansing the believers of their sin. Such cleansing is dependent on the Word of God.

5:27 — "That he might present it to Himself a glorious church" - the ultimate result of Christ's work of love is a glorified church. Such a church will have no moral blemish. Christ's love benefits the church. So a husband's love should seek the benefit of his wife.

5:28 — "So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies" - a man should love his wife as he loves his own body. The wife in a sense is a part of the husband's body, since the two have become one flesh. A husband's love is not limited to his duty. It should be a spontaneous response from his very nature.

5:29 — Paul shows how a husband is to treat his wife.

"But nourishes" — the picture is that of a nurse, who supplies physical nourishment and guides the development of a child from babyhood to maturity.

"And cherishes" — originally this verb meant, "to heat, to soften by heat," and then, "to keep warm." The idea of cherishing comes easily from the meaning "keep warm." The husband is to supply the needs of the wife (physical and emotional) with tenderness. Christ Himself tenderly cares and supplies the needs of His people.

5:31-32 — Paul quotes Gen 2:24. He then says, "this is a great mystery" (better translated, this mystery is great). The mystery is the before-hidden, but now-revealed union of Christ and His church. Every marriage ought to picture this union of Christ to the church.

5:33 — "But" implies "even if your marriage partner is not living up to this standard."

"Let every one of you in particular love his own wife" — each husband, without exception, is to have a continual love for his own wife.

"She reverence" — the wife is to have a free, immediate and obedient respect for her husband.