

WALK WORTHY OF CHRIST

Summary and Historical Background

God's method for getting His people to live holy lives is done by explanations of what He has done for them, followed by exhortations concerning what they should do for Him. The letter to the Ephesians is an especially clear example of His method. In chapters 1-3 Paul explained what the Christians have, and in chapters 4-6 he exhorted them on how to behave. First, Paul told them about their wealth in Christ and then he told them about their walk in Christ which was based upon that wealth. The walk of the Christian will be considered in Ephesians 4:1-6:9. In chapter 4 Paul discussed two contrasting aspects of the Christian walk: the worthy walk (4:1-16) and the wrong walk (4:17-32).

Paul described the worthy walk by giving several characteristics of it (4:1-3). He revealed that it is built upon seven unities (4:4-6). The enablement for the worthy walk is provided by the spiritual gifts given by Christ to the church (4:7-11). The goals of this walk are high and honorable (4:12-16).

The wrong walk is discussed in the last half of the chapter (4:17-32). The Ephesian Christians were the godly minority in the midst of the pagan Gentiles. The Gentiles tolerated homosexuality, adultery, fornication, and theft. Their sinful conduct was absolutely wrong for Christians to practice. They were to put off the old sinful practices and put on the new godly practices. Specific instructions concerning godliness were given, both negatively and positively, so that there was no excuse for ignorance (4:25-32).

I. Commendable Walk — 4:1-16

A. Command — 4:1-3

4:1 — "I therefore...beseech you" - Paul begins the practical section of the letter by urging the believers to walk worthy of their spiritual wealth. He makes direct applications to their lives and life styles, based on what he has written about the Christian's position in chapters one through three. The wealth of the believers (God's plan for them, Christ's redemption of them, and the special revelations given to them) form the basis for their godly walk.

"Walk worthy" — the word "worthy" was originally used of counter-balancing weights on a scale. An unknown weight would be compared with a standard. If the unknown weight was the same (or greater) weight as that of the standard, it was worthy. Paul suggests that Christians are to compare their practice with the position they have in the heavenlies. Similar expressions are found in Col 1:10 ("walk worthy of the Lord"), 1Thess 2:12 ("walk worthy of God"), and Phil. 1:27 ("let your conversation be as it becomes the Gospel of Christ"). The last reference has the same Greek word translated differently. These verses imply that Christians are to compare their lives with Christ, to see if they are worthy.

4:2 — "Lowliness" - Paul describes the worthy walk as a humble, selfless walk. The word "lowliness" originally meant "low lying" land. In the New Testament "lowliness" suggested one's attitude of humility before God because he realized he was truly low. As a result of this lowly estimation of himself, he would submit himself to God. It is a rejection of status seeking and a willingness to serve God (Phil. 2:5-11).

"Meekness" — the worthy walk is a self-controlled walk. "Meekness" was used of horses that were broken so they could be ridden. It was used of men who were friendly and gentle. A man who was meek could face insults without revilement or resentment. He could sit as a judge without severity or harshness. He could rule a land without violence or force. The ancients used this word to describe an ideal ruler.

"Long-suffering" — the worthy walk is a tolerant walk of long-suffering in regard to injuries caused by others. In the face of continual provocation his temper does not erupt.

"Forbearance" — the worthy walk is one of forbearance. The word "to forbear" was used to "lift up the arms" (as in holding a torch, or in boxing, or in praying). The idea is that a Christian should lift up other believers in their weaknesses and faults even to the point of physical pain and weariness.

4:3 — "Endeavoring" - the Christian must give continual earnest effort to preserve the unity of the Spirit. He must manifest the spiritual qualities listed in 4:2 to accomplish this work. When he does, the bond of peace will keep this unity intact.

B. Concord — 4:4-6

4:4-6 — Unity between believers is built upon the spiritual unities that they already possess as Christians. "One body" is the church. "One Spirit" is the Holy Spirit who energizes the body (1 Cor. 12:13). "One hope" is the expectation of glory that all believers in the body now have because of the earnest (guarantee) of the Spirit (Eph. 1:14). "One Lord" is Jesus Christ. "One faith" can refer to the body of truth and also to the personal trust one places in Christ because of the body of truth. "One baptism" can refer to Spirit baptism or to water baptism, which is a symbol of Spirit baptism. Both refer to the believer's union with Christ in His death and resurrection. "One God and Father" refers to God as the Father of all believers in whose family they have all been united. He is sovereign ("above all"); He is efficient ("through all"); and He is personal ("in you all").

C. Contributions — 4:7-11

4:7 — "But unto every one of us" - Paul addresses the enablement that each believer has for the worthy walk. This enablement is a spiritual gift, or a grace gift, given to each believer at the time of salvation. This spiritual gift is called "grace." The term shows that the gift is an undeserved mark of God's favor and an effective expression of God's power.

4:8 — "Wherefore He says" - Paul adapts Ps. 68:18 to show that these spiritual gifts were anticipated in the Old Testament. Such men were probably given for the service of the sanctuary, as in Num. 31:29, 40. Paul sees in this act a prefigurement of men who were given as gifts to the church.

"He led captivity captive" — the translation, "He led a host of prisoners of war which he had captured," expresses the meaning of the phrase. It pictures Christ leading a triumphal procession and in the procession are the enemies He has captured. This phrase probably refers to the utter defeat of Satan's powers by Christ (Col. 2:15, Heb. 2:14). It could also refer to the capture of men by Christ (salvation), so that now they can serve Him.

"Gave gifts unto men" — Christ, the mighty Conqueror, gives gifts to men according to His desires and His plan (cf. 4:7).

4:9-10 — Three facts are stated that are implied by Christ's ascension.

"He also descended first to the lower parts of the earth" - this phrase might be an extended way of saying that Christ died and went to the place where the Old Testament spirits went: He descended to hades. Or it may simply refer to Christ when He came to earth at His incarnation.

"Same also that ascended" — it implies Christ's resurrection from the dead to His ascension to heaven, and His ministry at the right hand of God as the High Priest of all believers.

"That He might fill all things" — a good parallel is seen in Jer. 23:24. This phrase asserts the omnipresence of Christ. He is with the believers continually. It refers to the all pervasive knowledge of Christ. He knows the needs of all believers. It implies the omnipotence of Christ. He has the ability to meet our needs. Christ is universally in control.

4:11 — Not only does Christ give gifts to men (4:8), but He also gives these gifted men to the church. The "apostles" were the witnesses of Christ's resurrection who were given divine authority to establish

the church. The "prophets" were men to whom God gave direct revelation, because the New Testament was not yet written. The "evangelists" were traveling preachers, like the present-day missionaries and possibly the modern evangelists. The "pastors and teachers" are the pastoral leaders in the local church. The term, pastor-teacher, refers to one office ("the" modifies both words, showing that the two words refer to the same office). The pastor has the responsibility of shepherding and teaching the flock.

D. Climax — 4:12-16

4:12 — "For the perfecting of the saints" - the purpose of the ministry of the four classes of men given as gifts to the churches was to perfect the saints. "Perfecting" refers to equipping the believers. The word was used for setting a broken bone or for mending broken fishing nets (Matt. 4:21). God gave gifted men to the churches to make the believers ready and fit to use their gifts (4:7) in their individual places of the work in the local churches.

"For the work of the ministry" — this "ministry" was given to all believers (not only to the leaders in the churches). There is a ministry that each believer has, whether humble or high, that must be done for the glory of God.

"Edifying of the body of Christ" — edifying means the "building up" of the body. This might refer to the numerical growth of the body through the evangelistic ministry of the believers. Or, it could refer to spiritual development of the body. No doubt, both aspects are involved.

4:13 — "Till we all come" - these words indicated a goal has been determined.

"Unity" — a part of the goal is the unity of the believers in their faith and in their knowledge (full knowledge) of the Son of God.

"Stature of the fullness of Christ" — Christ likeness in each believer is the ultimate goal. That likeness should begin now, but it will not be perfected until we see Him (1 John 3:2).

4:14 — "That we henceforth be no more children" - the word "children" implies helplessness, inexperience, and foolishness. Christians are not to be childish, being deceived and duped as easily as children.

"Tossed to and fro" — has reference to a ship on a storm-tossed sea. The action of the waves can often make a ship utterly helpless, without the ability to sail in one direction. The doctrine of false teachers can blow young Christians off course.

"By the sleight of men" — the words used in this verse for human deceitfulness are interesting. "Sleight" was used of dice-playing, in which "loaded" dice were used to win.

"Cunning craftiness" — literally it means "capable of all work." It is capable of unceasing effort to deceive unstable souls. "To deceive" is the word from which we get our word planet, or wanderer. These false teachers deceive others so that they wander away from the truth and they do it by their skilled methods and ways of deception.

4:15 — "Speaking the truth in love" - is not necessarily limited to speaking the truth. It could be translated, "holding the truth" or "living the truth." It simply means being truthful. But truthfulness needs to be tempered by love lest it become harsh and cruel.

4:16 — "From whom the whole body fitly joined together" - it grows as the human body grows and develops, when each member does its part, so the body of Christ (the church) grows and develops as each believer does his part.

"Edifying of itself in love" — love has been called the circulatory system of the body of Christ. It certainly serves an important function in the body (cf. 4:2, 15).

II. Corrupt Walk — 4:17-32

A. Condition — 4:17-19

4:17 — A necessary condition for spiritual growth is holiness.

"Walk not as other Gentiles walk" — Paul solemnly warns and commands the believers not to behave as the Gentiles among whom they live.

"In the vanity of their mind" — vanity refers to emptiness, purposelessness, uselessness. The Gentiles have no moral goal worthy of merit.

4:18 — "Having the understanding darkened" - the Gentiles lived wicked, licentious lives; they had **MENTAL DARKNESS**.

"Being alienated from the life of God" — the Gentiles were separated from God so they were deprived of spiritual life; they had **SPIRITUAL DEATH**.

"Because of the blindness of their heart" — it is not the "blindness" but "hardness" or "callousness" of their heart. The Gentiles had sinned so often against the inner witness that their hearts were calloused to sin. Immorality, homosexuality, slavery and mistreatment of infants were common sins among them.

4:19 — "Who being past feeling" — Gentiles had become calloused by their sins. Their sins no longer bothered them. They had **MORAL DEPRAVITY**.

"Lasciviousness...uncleanness...greediness" — the Gentiles through their hard hearts gave themselves over to wanton, shameless, outrageous sensuality. They practiced every kind of moral uncleanness that they learned and invented new ones to gratify their desires without respect for the rights of others. They had **PHYSICAL DEGENERACY**. [Bold outline is from Dr. R.V. Clearwaters].

B. Conversion — 4:20-21

4:20-21 — "But you have not so learned Christ" — a true believer in Christ makes a 180 degree turn from the practices, concepts, and values of the pagan world. A believer is taught by the Spirit to imitate the life of Jesus Christ (1 Jn 2:6) and is given the power to do it. A complete change will not happen at once, but a change will begin if the conversion is genuine.

C. Commands — 4:22-24

4:22 — "That you put off" - the word "put off" is a common word for the taking off of clothing. Believers are to make a definite and permanent decision to take off the practices of the old man, which is their old, unsaved life. The conduct of believers is a matter of their own choices and not the exclusive fault of the devil ("the devil made me do it"). The old man "is corrupt," but it is not static. The present tense of the participle indicates the old man is becoming more corrupt because of its deceitful lusts.

4:24 — "And that you put on" - the figure of clothing appears again. This is to be a permanent addition to the believer's life.

"The new man" — the new man is a revolutionary advance over the old man. It is created after God in the likeness of God. Two characteristics of the likeness of God are given: "righteousness and true holiness." Righteousness provides a right standing with God; it produces integrity. There is also righteousness before one's fellow men. "Holiness" refers only to one's piety toward God.

D. Conduct — 4:25-32

4:25 — Paul gives specific examples of what holiness and righteousness mean in the lives of believers.

"Wherefore, putting away lying" — this practice should be a clear mark of all Christians. Every form of falsehood should be put away.

"Speak every man the truth with his neighbor" — Truth should replace the lies he told before he was saved. Paul gives a hard and fast rule, a categorical imperative. Truthfulness is to be the characteristic of a Christian's speech.

4:26 — "Be angry" - anger is not in and of itself wrong. Indeed, in certain cases, anger is a duty, i.e., be angry with sin like Jesus cleansing the temple of mercenary men. But anger should not be allowed to become a sin in the Christian's life by allowing it to become a settled disposition in one's life.

4:27 — "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath" - wrath expresses one's provocation or exasperation with a violent outburst of anger. All anger must be ended by the end of the day lest the mood of anger develop and fester so that it corrupts a person.

"Neither give place to the devil" — continual anger is one of the devil's most fruitful fields for producing sin.

4:28 — "Let him that stole, steal no more" - the converted thief is no longer to steal. Some believers yield to the temptation to steal, but stealing is never to be a part of a believer's lifestyle. Instead, the believer is to work so that he may share the fruit of his labor with those in need. The stealer is to change and become a supplier.

4:29 — "Let no corrupt communication" - "corrupt" originally meant something was worn out or rotten. It came to mean decayed or worthless; it was of no value to anyone. Rotten communication is absolutely worthless.

"But that which is good" — speech is to be good, morally useful and serviceable. Whenever a person has a need, good word can lift up that person's spirit.

4:30 — "And grieve not" - the Holy Spirit is a person because only a person can be grieved. One of the things that grieves the Holy Spirit is unwholesome speech that perverts the purpose of language.

4:31-32 — Paul commands the elimination of attitudes which are inconsistent with the believer's new life as a Christian and to develop those that conform to the new man.

"Bitterness" — the same word is used in Jm. 3:11 for salt water. Bitterness includes resentment, harshness, and vexing nastiness.

"Wrath" — this is the product of sustained anger.

"Anger" — this is the disposition of impatience or irritation.

"Clamor" — this refers to the shouting and uproar of a mob.

"Evil speaking" — this is slanderous speech.

"With all malice" — this is ill will, malignity. It is the root of bad behavior.

"Be kind" — the phrase is actually "become kind." This is the first of three virtues must be carefully nurtured in a believer's life. Kindness expresses a useful act of goodness or pleasantness. It implies the capacity to show grace to friends that love him and to foes despise him.

"Tender-hearted" — from the very deepest recesses of a believer's nature there is to be compassion toward fellow men.

"Forgiving one another" — because God has forgiven the sins of the believer against Him, he must be ready to forgive the sins of others against him.