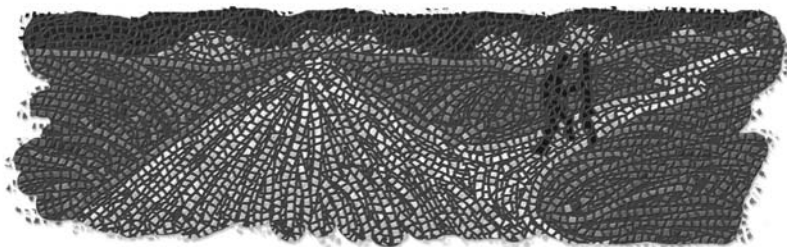


The Christian Walk



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exodus 20; Isa. 5:20; John 15:10; Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:18; Eph. 5:1-21; 1 John 5:2, 3; 2 John 1:6.*

Memory Text: “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light” (*Ephesians 5:8, NIV*).

Paul continues his exhortations on a life that will be “worthy of the calling” (*Eph. 4:1, NIV*) by telling us to undertake the Christian walk in all seriousness (*Eph. 5:1-21*). One doesn't have to read very far in Paul before one can see just how seriously Paul takes the Christian walk. Paul knows nothing about cheap grace. Though we are saved by what Christ has done for us, we must live in response to the salvation we have been given in Jesus. We have a new life; we now have to live that new life as God commands.

In the texts for this week, Paul provides five contextual reasons for such a walk: love, judgment, light, wisdom, and fullness of the Holy Spirit. Though devoting only a few words to each, Paul, nevertheless, clearly sets out what is expected of those who once walked in darkness but now are in the light.

The Week at a Glance: What does walking in love mean? How stern a warning did Paul give regarding the judgment upon unrepentant sinners? What does it mean to walk in light as opposed in darkness? What is the difference between walking wisely and walking foolishly?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 3.*

Walk in Love

“Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma” (Eph. 5:1, 2, NKJV).

Believers are called to be imitators of God. God in Christ is our model in everything—in ethics, in suffering, in obedience, in work, in prayer, and, above all, in love. So, we are admonished to “walk in love.”

At least three principles emerge from the words of this text.

First, Christ’s love is selfless. It is *agape* love: a love that is based on principle, not on emotion; an outgoing love that centers on meeting the needs of others even though they are undeserving of it. God’s love is such that He demonstrated “His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (*Rom. 5:8, NKJV*). To walk in love is to love the unlovable.

Think about someone unlovable. What tangible things can you do to start showing this person love? Why not commit now to doing it?

Second, Christ’s love is sacrificial. Christ is the supreme example of sacrifice. He bore the cross of shame and gave up His life in order that humanity might be redeemed (*2 Cor. 5:21*). To walk in love is to abandon self in order to minister to others. “Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ, and it is therefore not at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer.”—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), p. 101.

When was the last time you actually suffered in behalf of someone else? What does your answer tell you about yourself and the changes you need to make?

Third, Christ’s love is reconciling. Christ reconciled all broken relationships and brought complete unity (*Rom. 5:10, 2 Cor. 5:18*). To walk in Christ’s love is to be ministers of His reconciliation.

In what ways have you seen the power of love bring reconciliation? Think of an example you can share with the class.

Key Text: *Ephesians 5:2-5*

Teachers Aims:

1. To discuss the nature of the love seen in a true Christian life.
2. To stress the seriousness of sin as an impediment to a life with God.
3. To understand the elements of the Christian life.

Lesson Outline:

I. Walking in Love (*Eph. 5:2*)

- A. Christian love is modeled on the love shown by Christ on the cross and is thus sacrificial and selfless.
- B. Christian love is not an emotion so much as it is a principle.
- C. Christian love works toward reconciliation, just as Christ reconciled God and humankind.

II. Things That Weigh Us Down (*Eph. 5:5*)

- A. As Christians, we choose to walk with God.
- B. We should view our own participation in sin and evil in the light of God's future judgment upon them.
- C. We are not free to regard any sin as minor.

III. Walking in the Light (*Eph. 5:13-15*)

- A. To live a Christian life, we must actively seek God's help.
- B. God provides us with wisdom to discern His will, if we look for it.
- C. The Holy Spirit will help us to see God's will and give us the power to do it.

Summary: We are told elsewhere in the Bible that God is love. Therefore, it follows logically that if we are to follow God, we should live lives in which love is the first principle. As humans, our concept of love may be misguided or mistaken. In Ephesians, Paul attempts to show us what love in the divine sense is like.

COMMENTARY

In Ephesians 5:1-21, Paul calls upon us to take the Christian walk seriously in the context of (1) God's revelation of love and judgment, (2) God's provision of light and wisdom, and (3) God's gift of the fullness through the Holy Spirit.

I. Walk: In View of God's Revelation (*Eph. 5:1-7*)

The passage begins strikingly: "Therefore be followers of God as dear children" (*Eph. 5:1, NKJV*). "Be imitators of God," says the New International Version. *Be imitators* is not just an ethical appeal. There are many who do not know God but live an impeccably ethical life. The essential difference between Christianity and mere ethics is that Christians are called to imitate God as children who have experienced God's love and forgiveness through Christ (*Eph.*

Walk in View of Judgment (*Eph. 5:3-7*)

Read Ephesians 5:3-7 and then answer the following questions:

- What are the specific sins Paul warns about?
- In what ways are all these sins violations of the Ten Commandments (*see Exodus 20*)?
- Notice how Paul contrasts these sins with his admonition to “walk in love” (*Eph. 5:2*). Why are these sins the opposite of walking in love? *See also Neh. 1:5; Dan. 9:4; John 15:10; 1 John 5:2, 3; 2 John 1:6.*
- Look at the warning Paul gives in Ephesians 5:6. Given the context, what do you think those “vain words” were about? *See also 1 John 3:7.*

One of the great tragedies of life is to live as though God does not exist or that it doesn't matter if He does or not. Such an attitude fosters a life that is restricted to the present with no thought for the future. But the biblical view of life projects that history is moving toward an ultimate point when all humankind shall be held accountable before God's judgment (*2 Cor. 5:10, Heb. 9:27*). Final accountability to God is inescapable, and Paul warns that as surely as the love of God appeared for the salvation of humanity, so surely “the wrath of God” will appear “upon the sons of disobedience” (*Eph. 5:6, NKJV*). The divine wrath is divine judgment against evil and its children. Because of this certainty of judgment, Paul appealed to the believers, “Do not be partakers with them” (*vs. 7, NKJV*). With whom? Verse 6 speaks of those “with empty words.” These were false teachers still clinging to their pagan philosophy, denying the reality of sin and a final judgment for that sin. No wonder Paul warns them to stay away from such people and their philosophy, for they go counter to the truth as it is in Jesus. Paul expresses horror at these false teachings and calls those responsible as “sons of disobedience” upon whom will fall “the wrath of God” (*vs. 6, NKJV*). As far as Christians are concerned, the apostle pleads that among them there should not be even a hint, a thought, or a joke concerning such sins.

If you look at the kind of sins that will bring judgment, Paul said nothing about adultery or murder, the more “serious” sins. Instead, he talks about such things as jesting and covetousness. What should this tell us about the nature of even these sins?

4:32). Because God loves us, we must show His love in ethics, in forgiveness, in work, in prayer, and, above all, in loving others.

So, Paul wants God's children to "walk in love" (*Eph. 5:2*) and to walk in the certainty of judgment to come. To walk in love is to walk as Jesus did, for He is the supreme Example of love that Divinity has ever revealed and humanity has ever seen. Christ's love involves loving the unlovable (*Rom. 5:8*), loving while expecting nothing in return, loving to the point of death. So should our love be. The motivation for such love is not self-glory but clinging to Jesus, not ethics but evangelism, not achievement of discipline but adherence to discipleship.

Those who walk in love will let that walk be rooted, not only in God's love (*Eph. 4:32, 5:1*) but also in view of His wrath, His judgment that is reserved for "the children of disobedience" (*Eph. 5:6*). When you compare the children who imitate God and the children who await God's wrath, the distinction becomes clear: The former walk the walk of love that leads to fruits of obedience to God; the latter walk as children of disobedience who live as though sin is not real and God does not matter (*vss. 3-7*). "Neither artist nor ascetic scientist nor super-moral Pharisee," says one commentator, "is, in the Bible, excused from the humbling appearance before God as a sinner. Our Epistle allows of no deception in moral matters. There is no evasion. It is because of these things that the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience."—*The Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1981), vol. 10, p. 708.

II. Walk: In Light and Wisdom (*Eph. 5:8-17*)

Christians are God's children (*Eph. 5:1*), and as such they are also "children of light" (*vs. 8*). The former status demands that they "walk in love" (*vs. 2*), and the latter expects that they *walk in light*. What does it mean to walk in the light? First and obviously, it is not to walk in darkness (*vss. 3-12*). Walking in light means to bear fruits of "goodness, righteousness and truth, and find out what pleases the Lord" (*vss. 9, 10, NIV*). Walking in the light and finding out what pleases God are natural constituents of the new life of the Spirit.

Second, children of light will "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them" (*Eph. 5:11, NKJV*). Light may be the absence of darkness, and darkness may be the absence of light, as one Indian adage says, but light and darkness cannot coexist. As children of light, Christians must live so that they expose the evils of darkness. Christians must be known in voice and action for their stand against evil's every manifestation. "Such a character is not the result of accident; it is not due to special favors or endowments of Providence. A noble character is the result of self-discipline, of the subjection of the lower to the higher nature—the surrender of self for the service of love to God and man."—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 57.

Walk in Light *(Eph. 5:8-14)*

“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light” *(Eph. 5:8, NKJV)*.

Having defined the Christian life as walking in love, with a view of the impending judgment, Paul now turns to a third aspect: walking as children of light. In keeping with his style, he provides another contrast: Once you were children of darkness, now you are children of light *(Eph. 5:8)*.

While darkness represents the old life, light stands for the new. The apostle recognizes that believers have moved from darkness to light *(vs. 8)*. Since conversion they have become light in the Lord; that is, reflectors of the character of the One who said “ ‘I am the light of the world’ ” *(John 8:12)*.

Oftentimes we tend to equate “light” with intellectual knowledge, knowledge of facts, and “darkness” as ignorance of facts. **And though there’s some truth to this idea, read over Ephesians 5:8-14 and answer this question: What does Paul equate walking in the light with? More specifically, is it dealing only with head knowledge or with the moral life and the conduct of a Christian? Why is this answer important?**

Notice, too, Paul is so firm about living a life free from moral taint that he not only admonishes us to stay away from those who do evil but he also calls upon us to reprove them.

Read carefully Ephesians 5:13. How does that help us understand how we might reprove evil without having to open our mouths? *See John 3:20.*

Have you ever known anyone whose lifestyle, demeanor, and character acted as light that reprovved your darkness? How did you respond? Did you accept the silent reproof with humility and repentance, or did you flee the light or even fight against it by, perhaps, calling it darkness? *See Isa. 5:20.*

Paul adds one more thought about children of light. They “walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise” (*Eph. 5:15*).

Walking in wisdom is (1) walking with care and watchfulness, respecting and serving God, and turning from evil (*Prov. 9:13, 8:10*); (2) living with a consciousness of the nearness of the end time (*Eph. 5:16*); and (3) always living within the context of God’s will and wishes (*vs. 17*).

III. Walk: In the Spirit (*Eph. 5:18-20*)

Thus far in chapter 5, Paul spoke of three elements of the Christian walk: love, light, and wisdom. Now he adds a fourth and perhaps the most operative element: “Be filled with the Spirit” (*vs. 18*). The Christian life is wholesome and complete when that life is under the endowment and enlightenment of the Holy Spirit.

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Isaiah 5:20, Romans 5:10, Ephesians 5:1-20, Colossians 3:1-3*

- ❶ Compare and contrast selfless love with selfish love. Do the same with sacrificial love and reconciling love versus self-seeking and self-serving love. What makes it possible for humans to act and serve as Christ did? How does Christ’s ministry as recorded in Romans 5:10 motivate us to care for others?
- ❷ “Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth” (*Col. 3:2, NKJV*). How does focusing on Heaven change our lives and actions? Review Paul’s list of prohibited behaviors that bring judgment (*Eph. 5:3-7*). Why is there such a sharp contrast between heavenly things and earthly things? How has God helped you to “walk as children of light” (*vs. 8*)?
- ❸ Conversion marks a turning point in our lives. Recall your own acceptance of Christ’s salvation. How did it change your perceptions of *light* and *darkness*? What things did you discover in your life that reflected sin’s reordering of priorities and understanding? (*See Isa. 5:20.*) In a season of prayer with God, invite Him to show you other areas that need changing in your life. Invite Him to walk with you to make those changes possible.
- ❹ “Be filled with the Spirit” (*Eph. 5:18, NIV*). Why does Paul state this as an absolute? How does this filling impact us? How does it prevent evil? (*See vs. 19, 20.*) How are singing to God and giving thanks to Him positive benefits to our lives? How does praise to God impact our witness to others?

Walk in Wisdom *(Eph. 5:15-17)*

Our Christian walk, Paul has told us, must be different from that of the world. We ought to walk according to love. We must be mindful of the judgment to come in all we do. We should take care that we walk in light. Now Paul adds another dimension: walk with wisdom.

The Bible talks a lot about wisdom. In the following verses, what kind of wisdom is being talked about? *1 Cor. 1:20, 21; 3:19; 2 Cor. 1:12.* What are examples of this kind of wisdom?

In contrast to this kind of wisdom, Paul, in these verses, talks about a different kind of wisdom, a different kind of knowledge. As seen earlier, this kind of knowledge isn't mere head knowledge, a knowledge of facts, however useful and helpful and "good" those facts could be. Instead, the whole context here places knowledge in the context of what we do. The wise do correctly, the ignorant do foolishly, regardless of how much intellectual knowledge either one has.

How does Paul in Ephesians 5:17 describe what it means to be "unwise"? How do these following verses help answer that question? *Ps. 111:10, Prov. 1:7, Isa. 33:6.*

The world exists only because of God; everything that exists does so only through the will of God. It's no wonder, then, that knowledge would consist in knowing the will of God, at least as much as we are able. Though there is much about God and His will we cannot know, we can know that His will for us is that we live pure, holy lives, lives that reflect His love and His character. This is true wisdom. Thus, some of the "smartest" people in the world live in the grossest ignorance and darkness.

Ephesians 5:15 tells us to walk "carefully" (*RSV*) so we are not "fools" (*vs. 17, NEB*) but wise. What practical things can we do that will help us not to be "fools"?

Interestingly, Paul places the phrase “Be filled with the Spirit” in antithesis to “Be not drunk with wine” (*vs. 18*). The point is not between the Spirit and the wine but one of self-control in the Christian life. Under whose control are we—the Holy Spirit or something else? Drunkenness or other-induced frenzies take away self-control; affect rational and moral capacity; and lead to spiritual, moral, and social deviation. A Christian has no part in such a life. But being filled with the Spirit leads to a life of joy, thanksgiving, praise, and useful service.

In Greek, “Be filled” underscores three particulars. First, it is in the imperative mood: The command is not optional but essential. Second, it uses a plural form: The Spirit is not the privilege of an elite few but of the entire faith community. Third, it is in the present tense: Filled with the Spirit is not a terminus but a continuous experience.

Witnessing

Have you ever known someone who went through Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) to beat their addiction to alcohol? If you have, you know that the individual always refers to himself or herself as an alcoholic; not a recovering alcoholic but an alcoholic. This is because many believe alcoholism is an illness that cannot be cured, although remission is possible. Alcoholics also tell you that they never let their guard down, not for one moment of the day or night, because vigilance is the key to remaining sober.

Sinners can say the same thing. Once a sinner, always a sinner. True. But unlike AA, there is a complete recovery program available to those who will exercise faith and claim it. For sinners, Jesus Christ and the recovery plan of salvation is the much-needed release from the grip of sin. Like alcoholics, Christians see each new day full of fresh possibilities and opportunities. Vigilance is the key to remaining on the path toward heaven. Without extreme alertness on the Christian’s part, it becomes easy for Satan to distract and nudge in such subtle ways that those traveling the heaven-bound highway take the exit to Satan’s alternate road—a road that exacts a much higher toll from its travelers.

When Jesus’ followers admit they are powerless over sin, when they humbly invite Him into their hearts, a complete transformation occurs, because He *completely* saturates them with His grace. This is not simply a remission.

Now is the perfect time for recovering sinners to share with all they come in contact with how they, too, may ask God for complete abstinence from sin and begin the walk of a lifetime.

Walk With the Fullness of the Spirit

(Eph. 5:18-20)

To the four elements of the Christian walk, Paul adds the final and, perhaps, the most operative element: “Be filled with the Spirit” (*Eph. 5:18*). Believers filled with the Holy Spirit will have His empowerment to walk the Christian way in love, in light, in wisdom, and in the sense of the coming judgment. Enlightenment and empowerment are two of the great blessings that come from the indwelling Spirit.

Read Ephesians 5:18. Why do you think Paul used the example of alcohol there? What point is he making? *See also Rom. 6:16.*

Though Paul is using alcohol in his example, he could really be talking about anything that comes between the believer and the power of the Holy Spirit. In other words, we should let nothing control us over and beyond the influence of the Holy Spirit. Paul is making a profound theological statement that is fundamental to the experience of the new birth and sanctification that come as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit. The question every Christian needs to ask is, “Under whose control is my body, mind, and spirit functioning? Is it under the control of alcohol or greed or lust or covetousness or anything else that can hinder my walk with God? Or is it under the control of the Holy Spirit?” The Spirit is what guides in the path we should go; if anything else controls us, we will surely be led astray.

If we are to be “filled” with the Spirit, how much room exists for anything else?

After telling them to be “filled with the Spirit,” what does Paul then tell them to do? *See Eph. 5:19-21.* How are all these things related?

If someone were to ask you, “Have you received the Holy Spirit?” what would your answer be? What would you present as evidence of your having received the fullness of the Spirit?

One more thought: Alcohol has the power to enslave, to depress, to demolish one's self-dignity and to cause us to relate poorly with others. On the other hand, the Holy Spirit has power to help us live in fellowship, worship, gratitude, and submission (*Eph. 5:19-21*). That's reason enough to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: When we teach our pets to do tricks, we offer them treats to encourage repetition of the desired behavior. Share stories about the pets you have now or had when you were growing up. How did you feel about them? God rescued the nation of Israel (and us) from captivity. What a treat! Then He asked them to live according to His character as described in the Ten Commandments. “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out . . . of slavery” (*Exod. 20:2, NIV*). Share a testimony of God's salvation enacted in your life.

Thought Questions:

① “Be imitators of God . . . as dearly loved children” (*Eph. 5:1, NIV*). What was the first thing your child did to imitate you? Did he or she copy the words you used or pick up your briefcase to head out for work? These are poignant times. What is the difference between our children's attempts, and our own, when we try to imitate our Savior? Why is it so necessary to focus on Jesus instead of looking back at our lives before we met Him? See *Eph. 5:8, 9*.

② Look up the word *obey* in a dictionary. Then review at least five texts in the Bible that use it. See John 15:10; 1 John 5:2, 3; 2 John 1:6. What is the context of the word *obey* in these texts? Why is obedience such a difficult concept? How does a personal relationship with God change obedience from a duty to a privilege? Based on such a relationship, how would you describe the Ten Commandments to someone?

Application Question:

“His command is that you walk in love” (*2 John 1:6, NIV*). For the next four days, keep track of the first thing you do every morning. How did it include walking with Jesus? If you found that your only real contact with Him during the day was a hurried prayer before you drifted off to sleep, ask Him to help you change your priorities. Then keep a journal of how your life is impacted by inviting Him to walk with you from your first waking thought each day. Share your experience with someone who is facing the same challenge.

Further Study: *Walking in love.* “All who are imbued with His Spirit will love as He loved. The very principle that actuated Christ will actuate them in all their dealing one with another.

“This love is the evidence of their discipleship. ‘By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples,’ said Jesus, ‘if ye have love one to another.’ When men are bound together, not by force or self-interest, but by love, they show the working of an influence that is above every human influence. Where this oneness exists, it is evidence that the image of God is being restored in humanity, that a new principle of life has been implanted.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 678.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Based on Sunday’s lesson, share, as a class, examples of the power of love bringing reconciliation between either groups or individuals who were previously in contention. What lessons can we learn from these examples for ourselves?
- ② “Let no one deceive you with empty words”—that is, false teachings (*Eph. 5:6, NKJV*). What are some of the false teachings currently disturbing the Christian faith, and how would you handle them?
- ③ Discuss the question of what “holiness” is. Is it more than a mere adherence to the law? Can you be a strict follower of the law and still not be holy?
- ④ As a class, take time together to do what Paul tells believers in Ephesians 5:19, 20 to do. Sing some songs and have people give testimonies of thankfulness to God. When done, ask “What benefits do we get, as believers, by praising God and openly giving thanks? Why should we make a habit of doing this?”
- ⑤ Discuss the difference between worldly wisdom and godly wisdom (see Wednesday’s lesson). Are they necessarily in contradiction with each other? Can worldly wisdom ever help us better understand godly wisdom? If so, in what way?