Walking in Love

Believers are to imitate Christ by demonstrating His love and character.

Ephesians 5:1-14

Gait is a word that only athletes or medical specialists use very often. It refers to the way a person walks—the movement of a person’s limbs while in motion. When there is an abnormality in a person’s gait, it can potentially cause health issues. Likewise, every person has a behavioral walk, the way they move through life. One’s manner of life is of the utmost importance. In the experience of a follower of Christ, it determines whether Christ’s love and character are demonstrated or obscured.

What does a person’s walk reveal about him or her?
UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EPHESIANS 5:1-14

Paul began Ephesians 5 in the same way as he did the previous chapter—with the word therefore. The word refers back to the forgiveness believers have found in Christ (Eph. 4:32). In Ephesians, the concept of forgiveness is connected to two vital biblical themes: redemption and grace (1:7).

The concept of redemption has a rich Old Testament background. (See Lev. 25:25-27,47-49.) On many occasions, financial difficulties would prompt an owner of land to attempt to sell it, even though it was a family inheritance and thus quite valuable. The Old Testament law made provision for someone to buy back property in this scenario. As a result, the land could be restored to the previous owner. This is an illustration of a great principle of the gospel: Jesus replaced what Adam erased. The righteousness lost through disobedience and sin was restored in Christ (Rom. 5:14-16). As we are forgiven through faith in Christ, we experience this blessing of redemption.

What prompted this magnanimous gesture of redemption and forgiveness, this restoration of a lost status before God? Without question, the source of our forgiveness is the marvelous grace of God. Mentioned eleven times in Ephesians prior to chapter 5, grace is the source through which we are given new life in Christ. The word used for forgiveness in Ephesians 4:32 is not the typical word used. In this verse, Paul used a rarer word that is built on the root word for grace.

These two great concepts—redemption and grace—illuminate the beauty and depth of God’s forgiveness. This truth about the remission of our sin was the grounds upon which Paul’s appeal to the Ephesians was made. Why should we walk in a worthy manner as followers of Jesus Christ? Why should we strive to imitate God in our everyday lives? We should do so because of the forgiveness we have come to know through Christ.

*Circle all the words in Ephesians 5:1-14 that remind you of God’s forgiveness.*
*What is the connection between God’s forgiveness and our lifestyle?*
EXPLORE THE TEXT

IMITATE (EPH. 5:1-2)

1 Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children, 2 and walk in love, as Christ also loved us and gave himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God.

VERSE 1

It is a classic moment in the life of every father when he turns to see his young child haltingly and awkwardly following behind him. Certainly, these moments of delight put a smile on the face of any parent, but they can also create a sense of solemnity. Paul encouraged the Ephesians to be imitators of God. All of our attempts to imitate God are reminiscent of a child trying to step into a parent’s shoes. We never really even come close to approximating the greatest of God’s loving character. Nevertheless, it is to this that we are called, and it is to this that we must strive.

Our imitation of God is not an attempt to gain His favor or earn a status for ourselves. It is to be done from a status of dearly loved children. It is only as we come to understand how much love He has for us that we discover the motivation to pursue such moral and spiritual excellence. Paul had already reminded the Ephesians on several occasions of the greatness of the Father and the Son’s love. (See Eph. 1:4; 2:4; 3:19.) This is one of the challenges of daily walking in the grace of God, reminding ourselves how much He loves us and how much He has given to bring us back to Himself.

VERSE 2

In following the divine example of love, we will walk in love. Our spiritual gait is to be marked by a selfless consideration of others. Because we are “dearly loved” (v. 1), we are empowered to love as part of a daily lifestyle. Just as Christ is the model for our forgiveness of others (Eph. 4:32), so He is the same for our love. It is because He also loved us and gave himself for us that we can love others. Notice that Paul commanded more than mere sentiment. We are to follow the example of Jesus who gave and sacrificed Himself for those whom He loved.

Christ’s love for us is characterized as an offering to God, and we can apply that to our love for others. Paul described it as sacrificial
and **fragrant**. The latter description is rooted in the Old Testament sacrificial system (Ex. 29:18) and denoted that the offering in question pleased God and was accepted by Him. He responds the same way today when we express His love to all people.

*Does walking in love define what it means to be an imitator of God? Explain.*

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**BIBLE SKILL: Paraphrase prohibitions as positive commands.**

Identify commands found in Ephesians 5:1-14. Express them as briefly as possible as positive imperatives (for example, love one another). What are some specific ways you could fulfill each command? How would it affect others? How would it affect you?

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**ISOLATE (EPH. 5:3-7)**

3 But sexual immorality and any impurity or greed should not even be heard of among you, as is proper for saints. 4 Obscene and foolish talking or crude joking are not suitable, but rather giving thanks. 5 For know and recognize this: Every sexually immoral or impure or greedy person, who is an idolater, does not have an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty arguments, for God’s wrath is coming on the disobedient because of these things. 7 Therefore, do not become their partners.

**VERSES 3-5**

While love expresses the character of God, so do holiness and righteousness. The call to love others doesn’t assume participation in or approval of evil. There are standards of behavior that are
proper for saints. The phrase **proper for saints** does not suggest a “holier than thou” attitude; rather, a saint is someone who is set apart for the use and pleasure of a holy God. There is an imitation of holiness to which every Christian is called (1 Pet. 1:16).

Sexual purity is an expression of the holiness to be pursued by believers, and so is contentment. Just as **sexual immorality** fails to embody the character of God, so does **greed**. Paul had already associated greed with impurity (Eph. 4:19). Perhaps what these two vices share in common is that of turning the gracious gifts of God into commodities of sinful indulgence. Neither are appropriate as part of the lifestyle of a follower of Christ and **should not even be heard of among you**.

While lewd conduct is forbidden to Christ-followers, so is **obscene** conversation. It is described as **foolish** because it is of no value. It does not minister grace to those who hear it (Eph. 4:29) but has the opposite effect. Christian vocabulary should be marked by **giving thanks**. Much of the humor used by secular-minded people is cynical in nature. The lampooning of sacred things like sex, marriage, and family are grounded in a disdain for these holy gifts. It is safe to assume that **crude joking** includes forms of humor employing innuendo.

How might a believer lovingly excuse himself from an impure conversation?

There is a serious tone employed here: we are to **know and recognize** what is being commanded. Impure behaviors—whether that of sexual immorality or greed—are not indicative of those who **have an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God**.

**VERSES 6-7**

No Christian would ever want to participate knowingly in activity that would fall under **God’s wrath**, yet we all have the capacity of self-deception. As always in every situation of life, we should each examine ourselves to see if we have bought into any **empty arguments** regarding God’s holiness.

As alluded to previously, Paul’s use of the **therefore** conjunction in verse 7 marks the objective of his teaching. The apostle has
this in mind for all believers regarding people who behave in any ungodly manner: do not become their partners. Keep in mind how Paul instructed the Ephesians in verse 1 to be imitators of God. It seems that there is an intentional parallel here, intending to contrast imitating God with forming ungodly partnerships. Imitation is not a matter of “if” but “whom.” We will either imitate God’s example or mimic the behavior of those who don’t love and follow Christ.

How can partnerships (business, social, recreational) impact a person’s spiritual life?

We will either imitate God’s example or mimic the behavior of those who don’t love and follow Christ.

ILLUMINATE (EPH. 5:8-14)

8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light— 9 for the fruit of the light consists of all goodness, righteousness, and truth— 10 testing what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Don’t participate in the fruitless works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to mention what is done by them in secret. 13 Everything exposed by the light is made visible, 14 for what makes everything visible is light. Therefore it is said: Get up, sleeper, and rise up from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.

VERSES 8-10

Paul enjoined imperatives (commands) of a worthy walk to indicatives (truth statements). Believers are to behave in certain ways because they are light in the Lord. Notice that in verse 8 we are not called to be light. Rather, we already are light because of the Lord. The Christian life involves a process of becoming more of who we already are, to live as who Christ has made us to be. To walk in darkness is to return to what we once were. This is a higher rationale for holy living than to simply avoid punishment.
The Christian life involves a process of becoming more of who we already are.

To call someone a “child of” something is to identify him or her as fundamentally characterized by that thing. Since believers have a nature characterized by light, God intends for them to live as children of light—as individuals whose essence is light. To be a child of the light indicates that a believer is not the source of that light.

As those marked by light, believers will inevitably manifest good fruit in their lives. Light is an essential component to all growth. Plants don’t typically grow in the dark. Darkness is the natural state of those who don’t know Christ, nor have placed their trust in Him. (See Eph. 4:18.) Their lives are void of spiritual fruit because such fruit is the result of a walk that is marked by light. The light brings goodness, righteousness, and truth into a person’s life.

What drives children of light to walk in goodness, righteousness, and truth? It is the desire to be pleasing to the Lord. Thus, motive is as important as action in the walk of a disciple. To love someone is to, on at least some level, love what he or she loves. Believers can test themselves with this question: “Do I delight in what delights the Lord?”

How do believers serve as light in the world? What is the relationship between walking in love (v. 2) and living as children of light (v. 8)?

VERSES 11-14

A defining attribute of light is the capacity to reveal. When light shines, darkness cannot obscure it. Instead, light illumines and exposes. All the light has to do is be true to its own nature, shine, and be what it is. In a similar manner, believers expose sin by walking worthy of their salvation and imitating God in their loving actions.

While believers are not to participate in the fruitless works of darkness, they must be close enough to expose them. This requires believers live among lost people and befriend them without
joining them in unholy practices. Wisdom alone would tell us that there is danger in this endeavor. It is possible that believers, in their attempt to engage ungodly people, might become entangled in sinful practices. This is neither a small matter nor one to be taken lightly.

Our motives will invariably carry the day. This is why Paul said in verse 10 to test what pleases God. The sacrifices in the Old Testament were examined by the priest before they were offered to ensure that they were pleasing to the Lord. As a royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9), we must examine ourselves. Is our sincere desire to do what the Lord asks of us? Are our hearts sincerely and humbly seeking His will and not the gratification of any lower desires?

Apart from walking worthy in love and seeking to imitate the Father, believers will never be able to illuminate the lost in this way.

Christ calls us to live as light in a dark world, and we must do so with Paul’s words ringing in our ears: *Everything exposed by the light is made visible.* This exposure prepares the way for unbelievers to see their need of Christ. Apart from walking worthy in love and seeking to imitate the Father, believers will never be able to illuminate the lost in this way. However, as we walk in humility and demonstrate love through actions, we will be able to expose the lost people’s need for Jesus.

*What preparation must a believer take in order to be used by God to expose works of darkness?*

**KEY DOCTRINE: Evangelism and Missions**

It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ (2 Tim. 4:5).
IN MY CONTEXT

• Believers are to be imitators of God, expressing His love to all.
• Believers are to separate themselves from ungodly behavior.
• Believers are to humbly expose sin in this world through action and deed in love.

List actions of love you could show to a neighbor—actions that echo those Jesus Himself might take. What one action from your list will you take this week?

In what ways can your small group spur one another toward living a godly lifestyle in the midst of a fallen world?

Has the darkness of this world lulled you into a spiritual slumber from which you need to awaken? Ask God to examine your life and to help you be more aware of opportunities to be light.

Prayer Needs