

17 October 2021
Ephesians 5:3-21
WALKING in the light
First Mennonite Church

Many of you walk. You do it for a variety of reasons, including improving or maintaining your over all health. Kathi used to walk to and from the university where she worked. She did so for



exercise, but she also found that walking to work in the morning was a great way to prepare herself mentally for the day. Then, after work, walking home was a great way to destress. By walking, taking different streets to and from work, she also learned to know details about Saskatoon that I never knew. It's true that if you want to get to know a place, you walk it.

I also walk but I prefer to jog. In addition to jogging, I also like to watch people walk. Do you ever watch people walk? Sometime ago, I was in a busy mall. I sat down on one of the benches and just watched people walk. I saw people walk with strong lunging steps and then those who shuffled along. I saw a parent with a young child who was just learning to walk—it was a precarious walk! I also watched someone who appeared to be under the influence of alcohol, because they meandered more than they walked. I saw a senior citizen shuffle along using very short steps. I saw people waddle-walk, almost like a duck. Some almost stomped their feet as they walked while others walked so softly, their feet barely touched the floor.

Amazing! But watching people walk got me thinking about the Christian walk. How do Christians walk?

Here in Ephesians, beginning in chapter 4 already, Paul instructs the believers in Ephesus on practical matters of the faith. In chapters 4-6, Paul instructs us how we are to walk in the power of the Holy Spirit.

He says there are two ways of walking: **walking in the darkness and walking in the light**. When you heard the scripture read, you didn't hear Heidi read anything about walking; you heard the word, live: **Live** as children of light. Be careful how you **live**.

Different English translations of the Bible use different words. Some will use the word live while others will use walk. Now, the word, live, is a perfectly good word to use for the Christian life. There are times, however, when I use the word live, I think about lifestyle—she has a comfortable lifestyle, or his lifestyle is stressful or harried. At times, the word, lifestyle is quite static and unchangeable—at least it is for me.

I prefer the word, walk, as it gives the feeling of movement. **Walk** as children of light. Be careful how you **walk**...

The idea of movement is in keeping with Ephesian's emphasis that human life heading somewhere. Walking is a common biblical expression for how people live out their lives of faith. Listen to the words in **Deuteronomy 30:16**

*If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, **walking** in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess.*

Or Psalm 119 says, *Happy are those whose way is blameless, who **walk** in the law of the Lord.*

In John 11:9-10 Jesus says, those who **walk** during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who **walk** at night stumble because the light is not in them.'

Paul in Galatians 5:25 says, *If we live by the Spirit, let us also **walk** by the Spirit.*

Where is human life headed? In the Bible, human life is heading either to life or to death. Here in Ephesians, Paul contrasts two very different ways of walking, walking in the light and to life and walking in darkness towards death.

At one point in this passage, Paul suddenly said don't be drunk with wine. It seemed strange that he would suddenly insert this into his instruction. The more I thought about it the more I realized that he didn't mean "don't drink alcohol." Rather Paul used the idea of being drunk as a metaphor for what the Christian walk IS NOT.

Let me illustrate. Have you ever seen a drunk person walk? They weave, stumble, sometimes fall, and bump into things. It's sad. They don't know where they are going. Nor do they know what they are doing or saying. People do many dumb and horrible things when they are drunk, things they would never do when sober. Paul is saying, the Christian walk is not like this; rather the Christian walk is dominated by God's Spirit. God's Spirit helps us to walk straight when it's dark, enables us to walk in the light. So, the point Paul is making here is that it's the **way of walking** NOT the actual drinking that is the focus here.

Christians are called to walk in the light, to give up walking in the darkness, to walk in ways that are different than people in the world. When people around you are greedy and are worshipping money, you are called to walk as a follower of Jesus. When our culture treats sex lightly and loosely, when it dehumanizes and objectifies women, Christians are called to walk in fidelity and covenant, to treat these sexual gifts with reverence. When people around you espouse hate and violence to others, you are called to love and pursue peace and justice.

You see, these contrasting ways of walking don't run through the heart of each believer or even through those in the church, but rather through humanity. The ways of walking are between the "sons of disobedience" and the children of light. It's for this reason the Anabaptists in the 16th century said that the church should be a "believers' church", a city set on hill, for people would see their faith and their love. Our Anabaptist ancestors wanted to be part of a church where every single person showed their love for God in the way they walked, in the way they lived their lives in the world.

Here in Ephesians, Paul becomes very specific about church life: **if you are following Jesus you will walk like Jesus**. You will see this, this and this in the church, and that, that and that should not be done if you are walking in the light.

Years ago, I had a conversation with a group of Manitoba friends about what we could and could not do when we were children. Ruth grew up in a small diverse community where Mennonites were just a small portion of the town's population. Anyway, she talked about how her school had dances throughout the year, and she wasn't allowed to go. Her parents told her she couldn't participate because they were Christians. Christians, they said, don't dance.

What surprised me most about what she said wasn't that her parents said she couldn't go to school dances, but that her school **even had school dances!** Where I grew up, it was almost universally assumed that smoking, drinking alcohol, and dancing were the three ethical issues that defined whether you walked in the light or in the dark. So, there were no school dances. Nor was there a liquor store; Winkler people drove 10Km down the highway to Morden to pick up their supply! Cigarettes, however, were available everywhere.

I share this story for two reasons:

First, Ruth's story of not being able to attend a school dance is but one small example of how being a Christian meant choosing between two different paths, a path that was different than the path of many other people.

Second, we all know the Church is very diverse, made up of diverse cultures, people, and personalities. For some, dancing is wrong whereas for others it's an important part of worshipping God. For some drinking alcohol is seen as sinful while for others it's part of fostering community. Gifting of cigarettes is an important part of Chinese culture, and some Christians there do it.

What I'm trying to say is Christian ethics, how we walk in the light, encompasses so much more than smoking, drinking, or dancing. It includes all things in heaven and on earth. In other words, everything. In our culture, there are things we consider private—things like money, intimate relations between husband and wife, and mostly recently, Covid-19 vaccine status. Read Ephesians, and the other NT Epistles, and you will see how Paul has the audacity to speak about how husbands must treat their wives, how parents treat their children (we'll look at these relationships next week). Ethics include how we treat God's creation, how employers treat their employees, how we complete our taxes, where we invest our money, and I could go on. There is nothing outside the scope of God's redeeming activity.

Choosing how-to walk-in faith was key to the life of the early church. Today, I'd venture to say that all Christians believe that your actions should show the faith that you have in your heart. We do this in diverse ways, often depending on where in the world we live.

What does it mean to walk in the light, live out our faith? For me hearing stories is an essential part of my ability to chart my path. Stories from Jesus, stories from the Bible, stories from church history, stories from each other as we question, struggle, pray and process how we will walk in the light today, in Saskatoon in 2021. As we desire to follow where God wants us to go, we do make choices, choose specific actions, choose to walk down this road and not

that road. We ask questions, we wonder, we discern, we pray, “How am I walking?”



For some, outward signs of faith are important, so people know who you are. When I lived in China, I got to know a Swiss Mennonite woman who always wore a head-covering. I also think of the unique style of dress of the Amish or Hutterites, or some Mennonite groups.

Others may put a sticker

on their bumper or a decal or emblem of a fish on the rear of their vehicles that identifies them as a Christian. You may be interested to know the Greek word for fish is ICHTHUS. Each letter corresponds to a title the early Church used for



ICTHUS

“The Sign of the Fish.”

Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, Θεοῦ Υἱός, Σωτήρ

Iēsous Christos, Theou Yios, Sōtēr

JESUS CHRIST SON OF GOD, SAVIOR

Jesus: Jesus Christ Son of God, Saviour. I wonder whether these outwards signs of faith curb bad behaviour of Christians behind the wheel! These outwards signs mean that you can't be anonymous. You are always visible for others to see.

For others walking in the light it's more subtle. The people around you know you are a Christian. Whether it's your neighbour who sees you driving off to church every Sunday, or your co-worker who you've talked to about your faith. They are watching you, and you know that you are demonstrating to them what it means to be a follower of Jesus, both by what you do and by what you don't do.

As much as the letter to the Ephesians seems to highlight a dualistic view of humanity and the world when it talks about some walking in the light while others walk in darkness, remember there is another side to the letter.

First, Paul firmly believes that in God's eyes such division is never final. In many ways, portraying the world and humanity as either light or dark, life or death serves to emphasize God's determination to overcome it. Why? Because **God is rich in mercy** (Ephesians 2:4). As Paul affirmed in chapter 1, the centrepiece of God's strategic plan, the goal towards which God is taking all of creation and history, is to gather up all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth (Ephesians 1:10).

As I've said many times already, all things is the Greek way of saying everything—everything in the cosmos will be gathered up by God, all evil and darkness, all divisions will be reconciled and restored to how God intended it.

Second, repeatedly Paul reminds us that we are acting out of love for a Saviour who saves us by grace. *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing: it is the gift of God—not the result of works”* (Ephesians 2:8). We are not working our way to heaven. Our walk of faith is simply a response to the love, grace, and goodness God has demonstrated to us. Does the person who has the brightest light, the most watts in their crown win the best seat in heaven? It's nothing like that.

It's more like this. Back in the early 1950s, Ted Brown and Katie Dyck of my hometown were engaged to be married. Not long before the wedding, Ted got polio as so many people did during the polio epidemic during the that decade before there was a vaccine. It struck his chest, and in desperation to save him from death, the doctors in Winnipeg, where he had been transferred, put him in an iron lung. An iron lung is a machine that helped polio patient's breath. Ted was imprisoned in this machine, could never ever leave it, because if he did, he would die of asphyxiation.

Once when Katie went to visit Ted in the hospital, Ted told her to leave him and get on with her life. And Katie said no. Rather, once every week for more than thirty years, she faithfully made the two-hour trip from Winkler to Winnipeg to visit Ted in the King George Hospital.

Ted died many years ago. When I was young, I remember hearing about this story. Truthfully, I honestly didn't know what to make of this woman. To some extent I looked upon this relationship from the perspective of the world, or from the perspective of the Gentiles, as Paul would say. Why did she devote herself to this man when she could have found someone else and made something of her life? Why did she spent all those hours and gas money on the road to go visit someone locked away in an iron lung when she could have

used that time and money to do something else? But to ask these questions is the wrong way to think about this relationship, about Katie. Completely wrong.

Why? Because it's a story of love. It's this kind of love that keeps us close to people, even when they are difficult, even when we are difficult. This kind of love is the kind we need to keep relationships, even marital relationships going, even when we don't feel it. That's why love includes things like fidelity, commitment, and promise. This is love that shines not only on us but the path upon which we walk.

This week God's love can light your path. Faith made visible, for the whole world to see. Thanks be to God!