

New Man, New Walk

Ephesians 5:1 Therefore be imitators of **God**, as beloved children.

² And walk in love, as **Christ** loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to **God**.

³ But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among **saints**.

⁴ Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.

⁵ For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

(Eph 5:1-6)

I'm Walking

WALKING. WHEN COMBINED with just a couple more words, it can be a powerful image that can evoke hours' worth of thoughts in just seconds. Hollywood **films** you may or may not have seen or popular **songs** you may or may

not have heard can instantly give you a world of information with just a phrase: *A Walk in the Clouds*; *A Walk in the Woods*; *Walking with Dinosaurs*; *The Walking Dead*; *Walking Tall*; *Gunman's Walk*, *Walk a Crooked Mile*; *Dead Men Walk*; *To Walk with Lions*; *Walk of Life*; *Walk This Way*; *I'm Walking*; *Walking on Sunshine*. None of these are simply about getting up, placing one foot in front of the other, and moving. Each tells of walking with a purpose, walking for a reason, walking as a particular kind of person, or in a particular point in time. Yes, walking is a word that conveys whole stories worth of ideas.

In the Bible, “walking” is often **theological language**. It conveys the idea of **obedience**, **discipleship**, and **fellowship**. As such, it continues to help you understand what it means to “**put on the new man**” (**Eph 4:24**). How do you put him on? You walk with the Lord, you become his disciple, you obey his voice.

Something many people do not seem to realize, however, is that walking is strongly related to the supernatural world. God, of course, is the main part of that world. Enoch “**walked with God**, and he was not, for God took him” (**Gen 5:24**). “**Noah was a righteous man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God**” (**Gen 6:9**). “**When Abram**

was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless” (Gen 17:1). In each case, walking is directly related to obedience, discipleship, and fellowship with the One True God.

However, there is an **antithesis**. “They did not listen to their judges, for they whored after other gods and bowed down to them. They soon turned aside from the way in which their fathers had walked” (Jdg 2:17). “He walked in all the way in which his father walked and served the idols that his father served and worshiped them. He abandoned the LORD, the God of his fathers, and did not walk in the way of the LORD” (2Kg 21:21-22). “But my people have forgotten me; they make offerings to false gods; they made them stumble in their ways, in the ancient roads, and to walk into side roads, not the highway” (Jer 18:15). These are hardly exhaustive lists, but they serve to demonstrate that in the Bible, walking is a spiritual activity.

The same is true in Ephesians. One of the great themes of Ephesians is “**walking**.” In Eph 2:2 you “once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air.” But God took us out of that domain and “called” us to himself, “**preparing [good works] before-**

“Walking” with the Deity

Reference	Text
Gen 5:24	<i>Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.</i>
Gen 6:9	<i>Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God.</i>
Gen 17:1	<i>When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless.</i>
1Kg 3:6	<i>You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you.</i>
Jdg 2:17	Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they whored after other gods and bowed down to them. They soon turned aside from the way in which their fathers had walked, who had obeyed the commandments of the LORD, and they did not do so.
2Kg 21:21-22	He walked in all the way in which his father walked and served the idols that his father served and worshiped them. He abandoned the LORD, the God of his fathers, and did not walk in the way of the LORD.
Ezek 20:16, 18	Because they rejected my rules and did not walk in my statutes, and profaned my Sabbaths; for their heart went after their idols ... "And I said to their children in the wilderness, 'Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers, nor keep their rules, nor defile yourselves with their idols."
Jer 18:15	"But my people have forgotten me; they make offerings to false gods; they made them stumble in their ways, in the ancient roads, and to walk into side roads, not the highway.
Acts 14:11-14, 16	And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds ... [Paul said] Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways.

hand, that we should walk in them” (2:10). Therefore, we are urged “to walk in a manner worthy of the calling” (4:1). Therefore, we “must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds ... darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God” (4:17-18). Instead, as we will see today, we are to “walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us” (5:2). Every one of these references has something **supernatural** in the background: either God or Satan, either God’s ways or Satan’s ways.

Walking” in Ephesians		
Reference	Text	Supernatural Link
Eph 2:2	... in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience-	Prince of the power of the air
Eph 2:10	For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.	NT living temple
Eph 4:1	I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.	Effectual calling
Eph 4:17-18	Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God.	Deuteronomy 32 Worldview
Eph 5:2	And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.	Christ’s cosmic death-resurrection-ascension
Eph 5:8 or at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.	Light/Darkness
Eph 5:15-16	Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.	Evil Days

Our passage (**Eph 5:1-6**) essentially begins with walking. “Walking” appears three times in ch. 5, and each time **it begins a new minor list of commands**. In commentaries, it is common to see the unit as **Eph 5:3-14**. I haven’t been able to understand the logic of this. **Vv. 1, 7, and 15** all begin with the word “**therefore**” (*oun*). Each of these sections begins with “**walking**” (vs. **2, 8, 15**). So it might be reasonable to see the whole unit as going to vs. **20** or **21** (like the ESV Bible does). But that is a lot to cover in one sermon. So, following what is most likely a small series of chiasms, I’ll be looking only at vv. 1-6.¹

Walk Tall

The passage begins with “**therefore**,” thus starting a new section (though it is clearly also related to the last section). For two verses he will reinsert more glorious doctrine. The last six verses will be taken up with more ethical instructions. The purpose of the doctrine is to help you **walk tall**.

¹ Heil sees the chiasms as **5:1-6; 5:7-14; 5:15-20; 5:21-33; 6:1-4; 6:5-9**. **John Paul Heil**, *Ephesians: Empowerment to Walk in Love for the Unity of All in Christ* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 29-36.

It begins with what Lloyd-Jones calls, “Paul’s supreme argument ... the highest level of all in doctrine and in practice ... the ultimate ideal. There is nothing possible beyond this. This is the highest statement of Christian doctrine that one can conceive of or even imagine. It is really staggering, it is almost incredible; but here it is. ‘Be ye followers of God.’”²

The word “**follower**” (*mimetes*) could be translated as “imitator” or even “mimic.” With superlative effect Lloyd-Jones asks, “Is this possible? Is not this gross exaggeration? Has not the Apostle run away with himself, and allowed his eloquence to dazzle him? Is he seriously asking men and women like ourselves, living in a world like this, surrounded by temptations, harassed by the devil, with sin and evil and unworthiness within us, to be ‘imitators of God’? Is it possible?”³ The answer is, **yes**. Not in those things we can’t possess (omnipotence, omnipresence, etc.), but in things we can—righteousness and holiness.

Just here, I need to raise a point that some “Reformed” people like us might have a hard time with. Scripture says we are **totally depraved**. “**There is no one good, no not one**

² **D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones**. *Darkness and Light: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:17-5:17* (chapter 23), Apple Books.

³ *Ibid.*

... all have turned away.” So how could anyone dare say that we can mimic God in righteousness and holiness? If you are thinking that to even the slightest degree, then you have not yet understood what has happened to you as a Christian.

I’m not talking about some kind of Wesleyan Methodist way of looking at the Christian life. This isn’t about living a victorious Christian higher life or surrendering all or any kind of mixture of **legalistic-antinomian perfectionism** which fundamentally fails to understand the nature of the changed life in relation to the old. I’m talking about this in the context of Ephesians where we have both an “**old man**” and a “**new man**” living here simultaneously.

The solution to understanding how a Christian can mimic God in righteousness and holiness is not found in thinking of **scales of good and bad** or percentages of good motives in doing something or any other kind of works-righteousness way of thinking about it. It is discovered in **the doctrine** provided immediately after we are commanded to imitate God.

“*As beloved children.*” Again, Lloyd-Jones because he is so rich here; he makes a point I’ve been trying to make throughout ch. 4:

You notice first of all that again he is introducing us to a principle of doctrine. In this most practical section where he is dealing with the most ordinary things in life, suddenly he throws in this. That is why these Epistles are so romantic if you study them properly. You may say to yourself, Oh well, I have finished with my doctrine at the end of chapter 3, I can then go on to something else! But you cannot! You have not finished with doctrine. He cannot talk about anything except in terms of the truth, and so suddenly, you see, when he is dealing with the most practical things in life, he suddenly hurls this upon us and we stand before the most staggering and astonishing statement that we can ever face.

The reason you can be holy is because you are **beloved children** of the Heavenly Father, adopted into his family. In other words, this holiness and righteousness does not come from the works themselves, but **from your new relationship** to God. That is, you are **already considered** righteous and holy, truly and fully, in Christ Jesus. His righteousness is yours through faith. God has credited it to you and just as it is not yours because of some good act you did, there isn't an evil act that can take it away. It was not gained through your

works; therefore it cannot be lost or added to through them either.

God **does not view most of the world in this way**. He views most people precious image bearers who have turned aside to wickedness and sin. Thus, though he shows kindness to them, his wrath is also upon them. In Romans, this wrath means he gives them over to commit more and more wickedness. He doesn't stop them. They are not granted the righteousness of Christ because they will not have the Son for their righteousness. But the promise is that anyone who looks to Christ, trusts in him, bows their knee, repents and believes the gospel is now **righteous by a declaration of the heavenly court of law** and the Judge who sits at the bench. If you have never known this righteousness and what it means to belong to the family of God, I implore you to do so now, for this is good news. Turn to the living God, pray to him and ask him to forgive you of your sins and to cleanse you of all your unrighteousness.

The doctrine continues in **vs. 2**. There is a parallel to "*be imitators of God*." This is our now familiar, "*Walk in love*." **How do you imitate God? You walk in love**. The more I study this book, the more I see that **love** may in fact be **the dominating theme** of the whole thing. The word *agape* is

found in every single subsection of the entire letter.⁴ But before he tells you how to walk in love, he is going to give you the reason.

“Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us...” Love is self-sacrificing. What God is going to command you to do in the next verses is very much self-sacrificing. That, of course, is the definition of love. For one person it might be in the first set of sins. For the next it might be in the second set. For still someone else it might be some sins already mentioned or to be mentioned later. Obeying God is supposed to be utterly selfless. You don’t do it to get brownie points. You don’t do it to get into good graces. You do it because “Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.”

⁴ Heil’s chiasms are very helpful here, as each one has “love” somewhere in its title:

“Love” as Driving Theme of Ephesians (Chiasm Titles from John Paul Heil)		
To the Praise of His Glory in	Love	(1:3–14)
The Gift of Christ in	Love as Head Over All to the Church	(1:15–23)
Walking by the Great	Love with Which He Loved Us	(2:1–10)
The Peace That Establishes Unity as a Gift of	Love	(2:11–22)
Paul’s Gift to Make Known the Mystery of Christ in	Love	(3:1–13)
To Know the	Love of Christ that Surpasses Knowledge	(3:14–21)
To Walk toward the Unity of All in	Love	(4:1–16)
Walk as the New [Man] in the Truth of Christ’s	Love	(4:17–32)
Walk in	Love as Christ Loved Us	(5:1–6)
Walk as Children of Light in	Love	(5:7–14)
Walk in	Love as Those Who Are Wise	(5:15–6:9)
Be Empowered in	Love to Withstand Evil	(6:10–13)
Beloved Tychicus Will Encourage Your Hearts in	Love	(6:14–22)
	Peace, Love and Grace	(6:23–24)

The **motivation** comes from what we just spoke about, for it is in giving himself up for us that we are able to be justified in God's sight. What does this mean "he gave himself up for us?" The Christian tradition has almost universally said that this refers to **Jesus' death on the cross**. Jerome said, "Who is it that truly walks in love? The one who, for the salvation of others, contends against sin to the point of shedding blood, so as even to give up his soul for them" (Jerome, *Epistle to the Ephesians* 3.5.2). Theodoret says, "The Son has loved us and gave up his life for us" (Theodoret, *Epistle to the Ephesians* 5.2).

This is partially because it goes on to call what happened "a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." So, **Thomas Aquinas** takes us to Leviticus 4 and Isaiah 53 and the death of a sacrifice for sin and then to Leviticus 3 and other places with their the fragrant offerings of the OT.⁵ Perhaps Bullinger sums it up best, "The Father is love and declared his great love toward us when he sent his Son to die for us. With the same degree of love, the Son voluntarily embraced us, and following the will of his Father, he gave himself up to the punishment of the cross. Therefore if the Son and the Father

⁵ **Thomas Aquinas**, *Commentary on Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, trans. Matthew L. Lamb (Albany, NY: Magi Books, 1966), Ephesians 5, Lecture 1.

loved us that much, it is only right that we should love one another equally strongly” (Heinrich Bullinger, *Commentary on Ephesians*).

Someone has recently studied this passage and noted that none of the words necessitate the death on the cross (though they all must at least imply that he died).⁶ “Giving himself up” could be translated as “handing himself over,” which could refer to the moment when Christ was presented in heaven at the ascension as the greatest gift of all, a living Christ now enthroned as king of the universe. One of the interesting points he makes is that Paul is not contrasting our dying to self here to Christ’s death, but rather our living and walking in love. So, the phrase could refer to the whole event: death, resurrection, and ascension. However you want to think about it, it is clear that it is the inescapable, unsurpassable, inexplicable love of God in Christ for us, while we were his enemies, that is the theological motivation and reason for walking in love. This sacrifice of Christ won for you the right be saved and forgiven even as you were walking in darkness and sin with the very enemy of

⁶ Max Botner, “The Fragrance of Life: Reconsidering the Sacrificial Logic of Ephesians 5:2,” *Biblical Research* 64 (2019): xx-xx. At academia.edu, https://www.academia.edu/39240527/The_Fragrance_of_Life_Reconsidering_the_Sacrificial_Logic_of_Ephesians_5_2_BR_64_2019_forthcoming_Proofs.

heaven, perfectly content and happy in your miserable enslaved condition. Surely, Lloyd-Jones is right. This is **supreme, the highest level of all in doctrine and in practice ... the ultimate ideal. There is nothing possible beyond this.**” Therefore, you can be imitators of God because in Christ you are already considered to be walking tall.

Walk This Way

Now that you see that in Christ you are already walking tall, think about the way in which you are to walk in light of it all. The last four verses form a kind of **A. B. A. B.** pattern: Sexuality (3). Language (4). Sexuality (5). Language (6). First, we’ll look at them and then I’ll suggest what I think is **the reason** why they are here in this part of the larger list under walking in love.

Sexual Sins (Among Other Things)

Vv. 3 and 5 give us three sins: *immorality*, *impurity*, and *covetousness*. “Immorality” is the word common NT word *porneia*. Jesus says that no divorce and remarriage is ever justified unless *porneia* is involved (**Matt 5:32; 19:9**). Jesus has

Dt 24:1 in mind, the only place in the law that permits some kind of exceptions for divorce. There it is called an “**unclean thing**.” The Jews were as conservative as saying this meant **unfaithfulness** and as liberal as saying she hadn’t done **the dishes**, because that is “unclean.”⁷ Is that’s what *porneia* means?

This sin is an **outward sin**. It refers to **sexual sin**. In classical Greece, the word *porné* is a literally a Prostitute. *Porneia* is “**to prostitute oneself**” or “**the practice of selling access to one’s body**.”⁸ The Greeks, however, tolerated a host of sexual activities that Jews and Christians later condemned under the same word. In the Scripture it basically refers to **any sexual sin** against another person outside of marriage **in violation of Torah**.⁹ The **Testament of Simeon 5:3** calls it “**the mother of all evils**.” Curiously (for what we will see in a moment), “**The Hebrew Scriptures created an enduring association between sexual sin and ‘idolatry.’**”¹⁰

Sadly, in a world like ours, it is necessary to mention some of them. **Adultery** was categorized under it, though it has its own word and was a special case, even among the

⁷ See **John Murray**, *Divorce* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1961), 9-10, n. 10.

⁸ **Kyle Harper**, “*Porneia*: The Making of a Christian Sexual Norm,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 131:2 (2012): 369.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 377.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 365.

Greeks. Adultery is cheating on someone else's spouse. **Fornication** is generally considered sex while not married—with anyone. In the ancient world it would necessarily include special types like **incest** (sexual activity with a relative), **pedophilia** (with a child), **homosexuality** (with the same sex), **rape** (unwanted, violent sex), and so on.

It is extremely disturbing that we are now living in a society that has gone from perhaps the most conservative sexual culture in (at least) Western history to the most lax in probably just a few decades, and especially in just the last few years. But not just the most lax today, the laxest in all of human history. The most sexually explicit cultures in history do not hold a candle to us. **There is literally nothing you can think of that is not tolerated**, no, celebrated, and if you can think of something that isn't, don't worry, by the end of the week it will become a meme on Facebook and CNN will do a 12 hour expose on it as soon as you let them know. Then it will become the latest intersectionality criterion for newest persecuted minority group, and by the end of the month, no one will dare question it again. Mark my words, without divine intervention of a miraculous nature, polygamy and pedophile are next and they will be completely normalized to the younger generation within the

next five years. We can all fear what will come after those, for there is no logical stopping point.

“**Impurity**” is the word *akatharsia* and it has deeply **cultic overtones**, by which I mean it relates especially to religious activities. Probably half of its uses are found in Leviticus and Ezekiel. It often refers Levitical **ceremonial uncleanness**, but not always. In the NT, it is found in many vice lists (e.g., **Rom 1:24; 2Co 12:21; Gal 5:19; Col 3:5; 1Th 4:7**) where it refers to especially to **sexual uncleanness** of a moral kind (and thus overlaps *porneia*). But it moves beyond the sexual realms to other sins in the Ten Commandments such as **lying** (**1Th 2:3**) or just basic **rotteness** (**Matt 23:37**).

It is important to point out that while the ceremonial laws of Leviticus have passed away in the NT, the idea of Christians keeping themselves ceremonially pure in whatever sense has not passed away. This is because we are **a holy temple**. Thus, its more basic idea of ceremonial purity remains, even though it isn't talking about things like night emissions or a women's time of the month or other such things as it did in the OT. We know this because at the end of this verse he tells them, “... **as is proper among saints**” (**Eph 5:3**). “**Saints**” is a ceremonial word meaning “holy”

(holy ones). It is the language of the temple. Thus, this particular word was clearly important to Paul.

The final word is “**covetousness**” (*pleonexia*). This word is primarily concerned with **the inside—the heart**. It has been defined as “**the state of desiring to have more than one’s due**” (BDAG 824). It is found in several of the NT’s vice lists (e.g., **Mk 7:22; Rom 1:29; 1Co 5:10–11; 6:10; Eph 4:19; 5:5; Col 3:5**). It can refer to lust or greed or covetousness. It often has sexual overtones (lust), but also goes beyond into other realms of life.

These three words are repeated in the very same order in **Eph 5:5** with **one addition**. At the end of the word “covetous,” Paul gives a definition for this word. He defines it as “**an idolater**” (*eidōlolatrés*). That is, the act of coveting something that does not belong to you is, in a general sense, a form of **idolatry**. It is not being content with what you have and making something you want an idol in your heart. But, of course, idolatry is a word that is associated with the gods as well, and I’ll return to this a little later.

Two passages are worth mentioning in light of these words. The first is the new covenant promise of **Ezekiel**. The LXX says, “**I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be purged from all your uncleanness (*akatharsia*) and**

from all your idols (*eidōlon*), and I will cleanse you” (Ezek 36:25). It is very clear from the NT that this new covenant promise has been fulfilled in the work of Jesus Christ (Ezek 36:25 with Heb 10:22; Ezek 36:26 with 2Co 3:3; Ezek 36:27 with 1Th 4:8). That means, **this has now happened to Christians**. Yet, he uses two of the very same words here that we’ve just looked at where we are told not to walk in these ways.

At this point, we need to look at the last full text of Eph 5:5. It says, “*For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.*” Here you need to understand something **very important**. In a parallel list found in 1Co 6:9-11, the same Apostle tells us, “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral (*pornos*), nor idolaters (*eidōlōlatrés*), nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God” (1Co 6:9-10). This is the same basic idea as our verse.

I once had someone tell me that what this means that anyone who practices such sins after being a Christian simply

will not be in heaven. If you commit one, its all over. I mean, isn't that exactly what it says? (This man was a Calvinist who supposedly believed you couldn't lose your salvation). Well, **no, that isn't at all what it says.** He isn't talking about committing sin so much as he is your identify as a person. The commands are rooted in the nature of a Christian. You can think of this through the analogy of the entire woke-movement with things like critical race theory or intersectionality or LGBTQ where the whole point of these **movements** is to **identify people strictly on the basis of the color of your skin** (black, white) or your nationality ("native-American," European of some flavor) or by your sexual preference (homosexual; transgendered; cisgendered), etc. The whole point is these things define your truest essence. You are those things, they are your identity. They are you. They thus serve as a political means of punishing others who are not of the same identity while giving legal preference to those who are. It is really quite evil; the opposite of a biblical ethic.

Look at what the Apostle says next. "**And such were some of you**" (1Co 6:11). This may be what you *were*, but it is not what you *are* now. Yet he has just told them not to continue practicing those sinful behaviors. In other words, **they were their identity,** "**But you were washed, you were**

sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” Therefore, even though you *may* still act out these behaviors, they are not who you are.¹¹ It makes no sense for a freed slave to continue to live on the plantation doing his former master’s bidding. **He has been freed.** Paul’s solution seems very close to Bob Newhart’s in a classic sketch he did with a woman who had this terrible fear of being buried alive in a box. His psychiatric evaluation caused him to give her this solution: “**Stop it!**”¹²

Paul’s point is not that you will lose your salvation by doing these things, otherwise he would have told them that *because* they are still doing those things they are not Christians and need to be saved. His point is that God has justified and washed them clean, just like Ezekiel says, of the very

¹¹ An article that literally came out today makes this point very well. I highly recommend it. See **Bill Smith**, “Gay Christian?” *Kuyperian Commentary* (June 29, 2019), <http://kuyperian.com/gay-christian/?fbclid=IwAR0b6iFDhXskKXADl43RwbWo-8LBSHoqemCAzD9Jc5bfW7Zkj7JGnV30qIY>.

¹² **Bob Newhart**, “Stop It,” *Mad TV* Season 6, Episode 24 (May 12, 2001). There is an interesting Christian response to this brilliant sketch, and it is worth taking the time to read it (along with Bob’s sketch). I do think that sometimes we can take things like comedy a little too seriously as Christians. I still rather like the sketch after all these years and think in some ways “stop it” is exactly what Paul is doing, so long as you understand who you are in Christ. See Justin Taylor with **David Powlison**, “David Powlison on Bob Newhart’s ‘Stop It’ Sketch,” *The Gospel Coalition* (Nov 5, 2007), <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/david-powlison-on-bob-newharts-stop-it/>.

things we are talking about. Therefore, they are to walk in that light and stop doing them.

That leads to a [second passage](#) I want to mention here. This is [Colossians 2-3](#). Notice the parallel of walking. “Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him” ([Col 2:6](#)). He then seems to take the next part as a reflection on Psalm 1. “Rooted and built up in him and established in the faith...” (7). Psalm 1 begins, “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked ... He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither” ([Ps 1:1, 3](#)). In this way, how you walk as people planted by the Lord, rooted in the law of God and in the Lord Jesus Christ (see Psalm 2) becomes main idea of the entire Psalter!

He goes on in Colossians three to give a parallel to our verses. “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality (*porneia*), impurity (*akatharsia*), passion, evil desire, and covetousness (*pleonexia*), which is idolatry (*eidōlōlatria*). On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away...” ([Col 3:5-8](#)). This is exactly what we just saw with Corinthians and what we have been learning about throughout Ephesians. We were

dead but have been made alive. We have been seated at the right hand in heavenly places. We have become the NT temple of God. We have been made holy. Therefore, we must not walk in these things any longer. We must put them off and take them up no more.

Sins of the Tongue Return

There is a second grouping of sins in our list. These return us to sins of speech that we saw at the end of Ephesians 4. “Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving ... Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience” (Eph 5:4, 6). Here are the vices: “filthiness” (*aischrotés*) can be translated as shamefulness or obscenity especially in “behavior that flouts social and moral standards” (BDAG 29). It is basically everything you see paraded on social media or the news from “Gay-Pride” parades or anti-war pro-abortion rallies or student demonstrations against conservatives that come to speak at virtually any local college in America.

The next one is “foolish talk” (*mōrologia*). It is a word that is used to distinguish fools from the wise (**Matt 5:22; 7:24**; etc.) or the foolishness of the cross with the wisdom of the world (**1Co 1:18-24**). In Romans it describes idolaters who become fools and “exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things” (**Rom 1:23**), which in turn lead to immorality and a depraved mind and which begins a who litany of sins starting with homosexuality.¹³ How stunning that such a word is being used of foolish talk. It is truly the talk of fools.

The last word is “crude joking” (*eutrapelia*). It is found nowhere else in the Bible (including the LXX). The word in secular usage had both negative and positive connotations. Aristotle actually put it in a list of virtues, though he also identifies it among the excesses of youth!¹⁴ In the usage we know of, “the word does not indicate explicit vulgar or obscene humor or banter, it does indicate a conscious, though

¹³ Jason Piland, “Ephesians 5:3-4: Sexual Sins in Act, Thought, Speech ... and Sight?” Reformed Theological Seminary (2017). https://rts.edu/SharedResources/Documents/Charlotte/student_papers/JasonPiland_Greek%20Exegesis_Eph%205.3-4.pdf.

¹⁴ Pieter W. van der Horst, “Is Wittiness Unchristian? A Note on εὐτραπεία in Eph 5:4,” in *Miscellanea Neotestamentica*, Tjitze Baarda, Albertus Frederik Johannes Klijn, Willem Cornelis Unnik (eds), vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1978): 174.

intentionally subtle, attempt by the speaker to amuse himself and others at the expense of another through wit and innuendo.”¹⁵ It is “jesting that has gone too far, thus becoming sarcastic ridicule that cuts people down and embarrasses others who are present.”¹⁶ Thus, you could think of it as “suggestive language” or possibly off-color jokes or undermining wit or abasing humor or risqué language that deliberately tries to hurt someone else. These are obscene floutings of fools that hurt others and society as a whole. How much more in the church? In Romans 1, as here, it is because of these things that “the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience” (Eph 5:6; Rom 1:18ff).

The Walking Dead: The Occasion for this List as Spiritual Warfare

As we conclude, I want to make an observation about why these lists are here, under walking in love in the light of Christ’s love. As we’ve been seeing, none of these things are random. There is purpose in all of them. But what could

¹⁵ Piland, 12.

¹⁶ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 656.

possibly be the logic of having these two very different kinds of lists together going back and forth the way these do?

The most obvious point is that when you do not commit these sins, you do not harm other people in the church. In that way **you show love to them** and to yourself (remember the Golden Rule: Love your neighbor as yourself). More positively, by refusing to walk in them (per Psalm 1), you are becoming a tree that is planted by living waters. In it, your relationship and closeness to the Lord increases.

There are **things you can do** to positively help yourself with these. They include being in church regularly to hear the law and the gospel and partake of the means of grace so that you can remember the correct motivation for these things, fellowshiping with Christians which means building one another up in these truths, reading your Bible and thinking deeply upon it, and simply walking with the living Christ, talking to him, praying to him, listening to him in his word, becoming ever more his disciple. To know his voice you have to hear his voice. Also, stay away from places of temptation, surround yourself with people who will not draw you into the gutter at school or work. And for goodness sake, think of others before you think of yourself. I'm

sure you can think of other things as well, as most of these are just wisdom applied to the commands.

The [second thing](#) has to do with [the setting of Ephesians](#) itself. I've only come across one resource that has attempted to put these particular sins into the original context. It is a journal article that demonstrates how both crude and sexual talk as well as sexual practices were intimately related to pagan cult worship of the goddess.¹⁷ I believe this is at the very least in the back of his mind, though it is certainly not all that is in his mind.

Recall what I said earlier about walking and its relationship to the supernatural. In the OT, the options were not walking with God vs. walking with *yourself* but walking with God vs. walking with *another god*. This is the same kind of dichotomy we saw last week where you are either in the kingdom of God or the kingdom of Satan. You simply cannot divorce “walking” in the Bible from the supernatural realm. This point is so important, especially today because

¹⁷ [Larry J. Kreitzer](#), “‘Crude Language’ and ‘Shameful Things Done in Secret’ (Ephesians 5.4, 12): Allusions to the Cult of Demeter/Cybele in Hierapolis?” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 71 (1998): 51-77. In the article, Kreitzer presupposes an earlier argument he makes in another work that Ephesians was written *from* Ephesus but to Hierapolis/Colossae/Laodicea. Thus, his focus is not on Artemis or Hekate but the cult of [Demeter](#) (attached to the sign of [Virgo](#), [possible future article](#)) which was there. I disagree with him on his presuppositions, but not on the larger point that both lists of vices were intimately related to the worship of the gods and goddesses. As we will see below, it is clear that Paul has the supernatural worship of the gods in mind, even if a person doesn't think they are engaging in it.

we live in a day, even in the church, where the supernatural realm is essentially irrelevant or simply doesn't exist as far as people are concerned. Biblically speaking, there could be nothing further from the truth.

Let's look at what we've seen already in this regard from our passage, and I'll point out a couple more I've overlooked until now. **First**, we are to **imitate God** because we are his beloved children (**Eph 5:1**). This ties our obedience directly to God in such a way that as with the OT saints, we are walking *with him*! Our purpose for walking is to walk as his children.

Second, we walk in love as Christ loved us (**5:2**). Again, this ties our walking straight to a supernatural work of God. Christ's death, burial, resurrection, and ascension was for us. This was his love for us. Therefore, we are to walk in the way he loved us.

Third, we have seen that he ties at least one of the words in the first list directly to idolatry, and at least two others are related to it. Why would he do that if he was not concerned with the supernatural world? You might say, "**But an idol is nothing.**" Yes and no. The statue or the thing we are worshiping might in and of itself be nothing (wood or stone or sports or sex etc. are not in and of themselves good or bad;

they can all be used for good or bad). But consider what Paul says about meat sacrificed to “idols” (1Co 8:1ff). Even though he says in one way it is “nothing” (8:8), in another way we need to be careful that we do not become “partakers with demons” (10:20-21), which are certainly not nothing! It is the thing behind the idol that people do not seem to think about today. In fact, we mock it to our peril. Make no mistake, to a Greek, coveting or envy was viewed through the lens of gods like Phthonos.

Fourth, Paul has this interesting phrase in vs. 3 that the sexual sins “must not even be named among you.” If he had meant to say “spoken about,” there were perfectly good ways to do that. Instead, he uses a word he has already used for principalities in the heavenly realms where they are “names that are named” (Eph 1:21). Clinton Arnold says, “The calling of the names of supernatural ‘powers’ was fundamental to the practice of magic,” and this was certainly going on throughout Ephesus. “Every conceivable name of both known and unknown deities and supernatural ‘powers’ is called upon at least in at least one of the magical papyri [it was a very important part of that magic] ... [and three of the six occurrences of this word in Paul’s literature appear in

Ephesians].”¹⁸ Now, the words used here, as far as I can tell, are not words used for the gods. Nevertheless, he does not confine himself just to these words, for he says “all” forms of them are not to be named. In that kind of a culture, putting it that way surely would have had a powerful meaning to any Christian still attracted to magic.¹⁹

Fifth, the whole idea of filthy language was attached to the gods. Pan (who was at Ephesus) was a satyr god known for an absolute potty mouth. He was also a deeply sexualized creature. During festivals to these creatures, even kind of filth of mouth and body was taking place. It isn't that this is the only place where this kind of thing went on, but it certainly was at these places. Indeed, when Paul says later that “it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret” (**Eph 5:12**), it is quite possible that he isn't talking about late at night in their bedrooms or at midnight in a dark alley, but rather of the mystery cults and their rituals.²⁰

¹⁸ **Clinton Arnold**, *Power and Magic*, 54-55.

¹⁹ I have wondered if there might be someone in the background here with a couple of passages. “Pay attention to all that I have said to you, and make no mention of the names of other gods, nor let it be heard on your lips” (**Ex 23:13**); “Therefore, be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left, that you may not mix with these nations remaining among you or make mention of the names of their gods or swear by them or serve them or bow down to them” (**Josh 23:6-7**). Thanks to Tim Nehrbass for calling these to my attention.

²⁰ See **Kreitzer**.

Sixth, he talks about “empty” or “vain” words (**Eph 5:6**). We’ve seen how this entire list began by talking about Gentiles in the “futility” of their minds (**Eph 4:17**). In the OT, that word “denoted the futility of idol-worship,”²¹ that is, the worship of the invisible created realm. Though a different word is used here (*kenos* vs. *mataiotes*), the idea is exactly the same. Remember we went to Colossians? Listen to the parallel this time. “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception (*kenos*), according to the tradition of men, according to the *stoicheia* [the elemental spirits] of the world, rather than according to Christ” (**Col 2:8**). The *stoicheia* are created, fallen entities.²²

Finally, he ends this entire talk with the wrath of God coming “upon the sons of disobedience.” This goes right back to **Ephesians 2:2** where he says that we “once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.” Walking and following the power of Satan and the fallen invisible realm himself. This is walking in darkness, following after the master of the dark realm (**Ps 82:5**).

²¹ Peter Thomas O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 320.

²² See my sermon on them in Galatians 4:3 and 9.

Walk On.

That's what is at stake when you refuse to follow and obey this list, when you decide to walk according to these things. This is totally contradictory to who you are in Christ. The warning here with the supernatural realm is found from Genesis to Revelation. And I think, because so many do not even believe it is real in the 21st century, it is that much more dangerous. C. S. Lewis understood this perfectly when he wrote in his Screwtape Letters,

My dear Wormwood,
I wonder you should ask me whether it is essential to keep the patient in ignorance of your own existence. That question, at least for the present phase of the struggle, has been answered for us by the High Command. Our policy, for the moment, is to conceal ourselves. Of course this has not always been so. We are really faced with a cruel dilemma. When the humans disbelieve in our existence we lose all the pleasing results of direct terrorism and we make no magicians. On the other hand, when they believe in us, we cannot

make them materialists and sceptics. At least, not yet. I have great hopes that we shall learn in due time how to emotionalise and mythologise their science to such an extent that what is, in effect, a belief in us (though not under that name) will creep in while the human mind remains closed to belief in the Enemy. The ‘Life Force’, the worship of sex, and some aspects of Psychoanalysis, may here prove useful. If once we can produce our perfect work—the Materialist Magician, the man, not using, but veritably worshipping, what he vaguely calls ‘Forces’ while denying the existence of ‘spirits’—then the end of the war will be in sight. But in the meantime we must obey our orders. I do not think you will have much difficulty in keeping the patient in the dark. The fact that ‘devils’ are predominantly *comic* figures in the modern imagination will help you. If any faint suspicion of your existence begins to arise in his mind, suggest to him a picture of something in red tights, and persuade him that since he cannot believe in that (it is an old textbook method of confusing them) he therefore cannot believe in you.²³

To stop walking with the Lord is to start walking with the devil. Or more like *Runnin’ with the Devil*. The temptation is just what Jesus’ disciples learned when Jesus gave that great sermon on Calvinism and his body in **John 6:66** (an ironic

²³ C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: HarperOne, 2001), 31–32.

number indeed). “Many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.”

So Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?” (67).

Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God” (John 6:68-69). Indeed, they heard the Master’s voice because he called them (70). And they continued to walk with him until they all scattered at his death.

But Jesus, in his mercy and grace, came to them when he had risen. Some of the men were on the road to Emmaus when Jesus came behind them and said, “What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?” (Luke 24:15). They were sad, for Jesus had died. But then, he revealed his glory to them, opened the Scripture to their hearts which began to burn inside of them as they realized they were face to face with the living God.

The Christian world has never been the same, because Jesus’ followers called to himself have walked for 2,000 years with this Messiah in the ways of righteousness. In these dark days, make sure you are walking the narrow road by

faith in him, the road that leads to life rather than the broad one that leads to destruction.

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References to “Christ”

“prisoner of the Christ (Christou)” in 3:1	—“Christ (Christos) loved us” in 5:2
“mystery of the Christ (Christou)” in 3:4	“in the kingdom of Christ (Christou)” in 5:5
“in Christ (Christo) Jesus” in 3:6	
“wealth of the Christ (Christou)” in 3:8	
“in Christ (Christo) Jesus our Lord” in 3:11	

References to “God”

“grace of God (tou Theou)” in 3:2, 7	“imitators of God (tou Theou)” in 5:1
“in God (tou Theo) who created all things” in 3:9	“sacrifice to God (tou Theo)” in 5:2
“wisdom of God (tou Theou)” in 3:10	“kingdom of the Christ and God (Theou)” in 5:5
	“wrath of God (tou Theou)” in 5:6
“fellow heirs” (sugkleronoma) in 3:6	“inheritance” (kleronomian) in 5:5