

Sir Alexander Mackenzie was an early Canadian fur trader and explorer, who accomplished the impossible when he led an expedition across Canada from Fort Chippewyan on Lake Athabasca to the Pacific Ocean. His incredible journey was completed in 1793, 11 years before Lewis and Clark began their famous expedition to the west. Mackenzie's earlier attempt in 1789, however, had been a major disappointment. He and his fellow explorers had set out in an effort to find a water route to the Pacific. The valiant group followed a mighty river (now named the Mackenzie River) with high expectations, paddling furiously, amid great danger. Unfortunately, it didn't empty into the Pacific, but into the Arctic Ocean. In his initial journey, Mackenzie was disappointed. But ultimately, on his second journey, his hopes and his dreams were fulfilled in end when he touched the Pacific.

This journey we call life can often be so full of surprises. Rarely does it seem things happen the way we expect. At times the detours and deviations we encounter throughout life can be of great joy; at other times we face bitter heartaches and disappointments. We see this in the life of Dr. Lenore Campbell, a small town doctor, who tells of visiting a patient who was waking up out of anesthesia after surgery. As the woman awakened in the post-op of in the second floor of the hospital, she could hear chimes sounding from the church in town. "I must be in heaven," she murmured. Then the woman raised her head and saw the doctor standing there. "No, I can't be in heaven," she said, "Dr. Campbell is here."

There will be day when we awaken from the drowsiness of living fallen, sinful lives in a fallen sinful, world – and we who truly know Jesus as our Lord and Savior will *not be* disappointed. And so as we live in between the dream and coming true as we “walk” towards that hope. “Walk” is the word the apostle Paul has chosen in his letter to those of us in the church to describe our journey with God through the mountains and valleys and rivers of life. Last week we saw in the first sixteen verses of Ephesians 4 that God’s expectations and standards for those of us who have surrendered our hearts and lives to Jesus – is that we are to “walk” in a manner worthy of our calling, by becoming “*one in Christ*” in cultivating an attitude of unity in our midst. In this next section, Paul goes on to explain how that happens and how we can do that. *Corporate unity*, he argues, is a consequence, an outgrowth, of *personal purity*. If our walk with the Lord as individuals is pure, then our walk together with one another will be pure - and then we will have unity. Disunity, division, and conflict are evidence that the individual members of the body of Christ are not walking the path to which they are called.

*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 because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!— assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.* Ephesians 4:17-24

In these words Paul appeals to those of us in the church to leave our old way of life and turn to Christ. The Bible makes it clear that we are either really, really saved or we are not. So when Paul says here that we are to “*no longer walk as the Gentiles do*” he is saying that there is a Christian “walk” - *a new life*; and there’s a non-Christian walk – *an old life*, and they do not share the same path. There are two paths, one saved and one lost, and they do not cross. In our text for today Paul explains in detail the difference between these two walks, these two paths, the difference between the old life of being lost without Christ and the new life we have been given through the cleansing blood of the cross of Christ.

In our text for today Paul begins by first challenging us about *our “walk” without God*. This is for those of us who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ, who think that we can deny ourselves, take up your cross and follow Jesus, *but who* are still walking path of the *“old self.”* The old life, Paul says, was one of *“futility”* of the *“mind . . . darkened in . . . understanding, alienated from the life of God because”* of *“ignorance . . . due to . . . hardness of heart.”* This is the progression of sin, the downward path of our walk without God that begins with a stubborn, hard-hearted rejection of the truth of God’s Word.

Paul tells us that progression of sin begins with a *“hardness of heart.”* The original Greek word here means *“to be petrified.”* Unresolved sin, unrepentant attitudes, and self-centeredness have a *“petrifying,”* hardening effect on our hearts. And once our hearts are hardened we then fall into *“ignorance”*- which literally means to *“become unaware.”* When we focus on our wants, our desires, our opinions, and our feelings we are no longer aware of anyone or anything except ourselves. And then when we are hardened and unaware, we then become *“darkened in . . . understanding.”* The greatest disease the community of faith suffers from, is the shallowness of *understanding* of who God is, which stems from a spiritual apathy to know the true depths of God. Many who claim Christ are often just as unsatisfied and unfulfilled as those who don’t know Jesus - because they try to appease their craving is for a deep, intimate relationship with God with the toys and pleasure of this world.

God’s Word tells us here that those who *“walk”* in their faith this way - suffer from *“futility of their minds.”* This is a life which is *“alienated from the life of God”* which makes one *“callous... given . . . up to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.”* So, a hardness of heart towards the reality of sin first leads to darkness of mind, then to deadness of soul, and finally to the recklessness of life. We lose our lives when we lose our sensitivity, our awareness, our intimate affection towards God. Some of us are walking far down that path; others of us step off that path fairly quickly. But as sinners we all do walk that same path – and regardless of length or depth, that path is a downward slope towards an eternal destruction. Sadly some who claim Christ still linger on that path with little evidence of a new life. Paul challenges us to consider where we are in our *“walk”* with God.

This is hard for most of us to truthfully do. Romans 3:23 tells us that we *“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* and 1 John 1: 6; 8 tells us that: *“If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth”* and *“if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”* But while these verses are true, we also must remember that regardless of where we have been or where are right now on the path of life - we are called to *“walk,”* - to move, to make progress in our faith through Jesus Christ. Paul says we make progress in our walk in three ways.

First, Jesus Christ is the *teaching* of what we have *learned*. When we do wander down the path that alienates us from the life of God - Paul shouts out: *“But that is not the way you LEARNED Christ!”* Yes, we do learn that Jesus is the Word who became flesh, the Son of God who died for our sins, rose from the dead, and reigns now and forever. But we must *learn* Jesus is even more than that. In God’s Word we also learn that Jesus *demand*s that we live new lives, which are dramatically different than our old lives. *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it”* (Matt 16:24-25).

Secondly, not only is Jesus the *teaching* of what we have *learned*, Jesus is also our *teacher*. *“Assuming that you have heard about him.”* When we hear *“about”* Jesus, we are hearing *“him.”* Not only did Jesus preach and teach great, divine, eternal truths - Jesus’ life was an open book of instruction on who God is and who God wants us to be. The teaching of our Savior can be applied into every corner of our lives, in every circumstance, no matter the situation. In other words, Jesus taught us about Jesus, about who he is and what is ultimately most important in this life and in the life to come.

3) Thirdly, Jesus is not only *the teaching and the teacher* - Jesus is also *the context of the teaching*. *“But that is not the way you learned Christ! — assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him.”* We learn Jesus and about Jesus *“IN him.”* Everything we do and say and learn is to be done in the context, in the *atmosphere, in the reality* of Jesus’ presence. Jesus is not some far off heavenly Superman who swoops in at the call of our prayers. Christ dwells *“in”* the hearts and lives of God’s people. Jesus lives in us; we live and learn and are glorified *“in HIM.”* God’s Word is telling us, teaching us that we are always to live our lives *in him, in Christ* and live out our lives *“in him, in Christ.”* Paul uses the phrase *“In him”* or *“in Christ”* 27 times in Ephesians, 164 times in his 13 epistles.

What we are to learn is the truth *“as the truth is in Jesus.”* What is the *“truth in”* Jesus? The truth in Jesus is that in confessing our sins, in acknowledging our need for God, in repenting and turning away from sin and turning to embracing Jesus as Lord and Savior - we have forgiveness and eternal life through the shed blood and risen body of Jesus Christ who gave His life as a sacrifice as payment for the penalty for sin God requires, so we can *“put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”*

Brothers and sisters, our new life *“in Christ”* should be radically different from the old life of the world. We are called to *“put off your old self”* AND *“put on the new self.”* The truth of God’s Word here is that - it’s not enough simply to die to the old life, we must also put on the resurrected and risen life of the new life. Putting off *“the old self”* does not make you a new creation in Christ. *“Putting on the new self”* does. Romans 6:4 says: *“We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”* What Paul is saying is that dying to sin does not give us new life – living *“in Christ”* does. While putting off the *“old self”* does not save us, we must put off the *“old self”* before we can put on the *“new self.”*

Paul’s words here tell us that our former manner of life - our *“old self”* - was corrupted through our sinful *“deceitful desires.”* But *“in Jesus”* we now have a *“new self”* which has been created in *“the likeness of God”* - a new re-creation of our original state - which is of God’s *“true righteousness and holiness.”* In our *“new self”* we are *“in Jesus”* - and our walk *“in Jesus”* must be a constant, continuous, growing ever into the glorious love and grace of God through a renewing of *“the spirit”* of *“our minds.”* Paul is telling us that salvation is not a one-time event of commitment; it is a persistent purifying and ceaseless yielding of one’s heart, mind, soul and strength unto the guidance of the Holy Spirit for the glory of God. The apostle then tells us what that continuous walk of purity looks like.

*Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.* Ephesians 4:25-32

In these closing words of Ephesians 4 God’s Word gives us five clear-cut, rubber-hits-the-road, evidences of a true and pure walk with Jesus *“in Jesus”*- a walk that gives evidence not only a putting off the *“old self”* but also the putting on the *“new self. . . in Christ.”*

1) The first evidence of a pure walk in Christ is - truth: *“Put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.”* There is only one truth but there are two kinds of lies: lies which we speak and lies of which we are silent. Some lies are of speech, even if it might be partial truth. Sadly we see this lie often in the church as gossip. But truth which is not spoken is also a lie; silence in the face of untruth is sinful. Since *“we are members of one another”* the body cannot function properly unless our communication is built on truth. Lying betrays trust and is a cancer, which will kill the body. Those with a pure walk always speak truth.

2) The second evidence of a pure walk in Christ is - anger. *“Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity to the devil.”* Scripture teaches us there are two kinds of anger: one is righteous, the other is unrighteous. Anger which is selfish or uncontrolled or directed against people is unrighteous. Anger which is directed against sin and ungodliness is righteous. Anger is only righteous if it is free of injured pride, spite, animosity, or revenge. If not, it is unrighteous anger. *“Be angry and do not sin.”* There is a great need today for righteous anger. As God hates sin, so should we. John Wesley said, *“Give me a hundred men who fear nothing but God, and who know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and who hate nothing but sin, and I will shake the world.”* Today, we are far too comfortable with our sin, far too willing to compromise with ungodliness, far too tolerant of unrighteous anger. And we are suffering the consequences. We need to be angry about our sin.

Also, unresolved or unsettled unrighteous anger is one of the greatest causes of division and strife in this world and in the church: *“do not let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity to the devil.”* If we allow barriers and hurts to develop in our relationships, and we do not make efforts to confront and mend those conflicts – the devil then has great opportunity to sow dissension and disunity through the hole of an unhealed breach in our lives and our fellowship. We must confess our wrongs, admit our need, seek forgiveness, and gracefully forgive others as Christ forgave us.

3) The third evidence of a pure walk in Christ is - honesty. *“Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.”* These words reflect the eighth commandment which tells us we are not to steal. These Old and New Testament directives still have wide application today not only in regard to other people’s property and possessions - but also in respect to paying taxes, treating your employees well, and in putting in an honest day’s work for your wages. Notice here Paul does not say, *“Be honest in your work so you can become wealthy.”* Instead he says we are to be *“doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.”* Those who are truly walking with Jesus see work not as a way to accumulate but rather as a means to sacrificially distribute and give away.

4) The fourth evidence of a pure walk in Christ is - our talk. *“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”* Our sovereign, omnipotent God created everything by the power of speaking words. In being created in the image of God, our words have great power also. Jesus taught there is great significance to our speech; our words reveal what is in our hearts. Words have great power. The Bible tells us that one day we all will be called to account for every careless word we’ve spoken. If we are truly a new creation in Christ our words should encourage, exhort, and heal. We are to *“give grace”* even when disciplining and correcting. We read here also that unkind, hurtful, offensive, or insulting words grieve the Holy Spirit. Since we have been *“sealed for the day of redemption”* we should then think like it, act like it, and talk like it - communicating with one another with the same Spirit that redeemed us. We are to have redemptive conversations. Our words are to reflect the cross. Every Spirit filled believer should seek to salt their conversations with the glories of God not the accusations of the devil.

5) The fifth and last evidence of a pure walk in Christ is - forgiveness. *“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”* Here we read that there is clear difference between these two sets of behaviors: on one side – bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor (shouting at one another), and slander. On the other - kindness, tender-heartedness, and forgiveness. *“Forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”* This is probably one of the most difficult verses in God’s Word for us to put into application.

The secret to practicing the pure walk of truth of forgiving this way is to look upwards and outwards instead of downwards and inwards. *Upwards at God:* knowing that it is only by His forgiveness through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ that we will stand forgiven and justified before God. *Outwards at others* - knowing that “there but by the grace of God go I” – loving others as Christ loves us. But not *downwards, standing over and judging others* – and not *inwards at self* – where the self-centered heart of a sinner pridefully beats, waiting to cry “foul” at the most minor hurt feeling.

This particular evidence of a pure walk in Christ very well could be the most important of them all. We see that in the words of our Lord Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount when we said: *“If you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses”* (Matthew 6:14-15). This particular principle is repeated numerous times in the Bible, which means God’s is trying to make a point. And the point is if we refuse to forgive someone, God will not forgive us. Period. No exceptions. Everyone one of us. This is hard for us because forgiving is hard for us. It was hard for Jesus too. Praise God for the cross.

Oh, brothers and sisters, we are such in need of Jesus! Because we all possess deep within our hearts the fallen nature of sin - the *“new life walk”* of truth, anger, honesty, our talk and forgiveness is arduous and difficult at best. These words written by Paul almost 2000 years ago throw before us the great challenge to live above our currently established principles, the grand task of raising the bar, the standards of the purity of our *“walk”* with our Lord Jesus. As I studied and prayed and wrote this week, I did find those things in here – divine principles and applications which have great meaning for me, which I have just shared with you today. But walking through this text at this time in my life – I felt like I was like Alexander Mackenzie – seeking a destination while facing mighty rivers filled with hazardous rapids, unknown waterfalls, mysterious currents, and unknown dangers around each bend.

What that means in the context of our *“walk”* with God – is that whether we in the *“old self”* or the *“new self”* or somewhere in between, we still have farther to go - *to get to Jesus*. He is to be our destination. Without Jesus we will never the *power* to put off the *“old self”* or the *purity* to put on the *“new self.”* I sense among many in our midst do hunger and yearn to move deeper with God in their walk with Jesus. I also sense that’s not true for everyone; some of you are satisfied just where you are. And if that’s you, know that I am praying for you today. I am praying for you because I fear that you are missing out on something – and that something is an eternal walk in Christ, with Christ. Some folks are not too happy when I bring this up – but in Matthew 7:21-23 Jesus said: *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”* The point Jesus is making here is that we can claim to be following Jesus, and even do great things *for him*, but if we do not deeply and intimately *know him* - everything we have done for him will be considered *“lawlessness.”* Whether we’ve done a lot for Jesus or nothing at all – it’s all the same, if Jesus says to you: *“I never knew you.”*

You see the Bible teaches us the *knowing* Jesus happens when you have an encounter with Jesus that *dramatically changes your life*. Now that encounter may happen like a giant tidal wave or by the light pattering of rain over a long period of time. But nonetheless, it is a dramatic putting off the “*old self*” and a dramatic putting on the “*new self*” that is evidenced by a melting of the heart; by an acute self-awareness of sin; by a yearning for a greater understanding of God; by learning about Jesus and listening to Jesus and seeing Jesus in the context of our everyday lives; and by embracing of the truth God, an anger about sin, an honesty in relationships, a talk that matches our walk, a forgiving spirit that is rooted the grace and mercy and love we have received through Jesus Christ.

Jesus had a dramatic transformational effect on every person he encountered. They either angrily rejected him or they fully embraced him. Those who embraced him were looking for a new life; those who rejected him were not. A story it told of man who bought a new radio, brought it home, placed it on his refrigerator, plugged it in, and tuned it to WSM in Nashville, Tennessee - home of the Grand Ole Opry. He then pulled all the knobs off - because he had already tuned into all he ever wanted or expected to hear. The standard by which he set his musical tastes was set. I fear many who claim Jesus are settled into living their lives in the same way. If that’s you, know that I’m praying - *that you would want more of Jesus*. It’s been said that some people will change when they see the light. Others change only when they feel the heat. You need to know I am praying for both.

Those who truly *know* Jesus want more of Jesus. And they don’t just talk like they want more of Jesus, they “*walk*” like that want more of Jesus – even in the face of mighty rivers filled with hazards and unknowns and mysteries currents, and dangers around each bend. We live in troubled days. Our world today is saturated with fear and anger and division and violence and death. There are so many people who are caught up in what is going on in the world, who are wandering far away from God; who struggling with hazards and unknowns and mysteries and dangers around each bend; who do not know Jesus and Jesus does not know them either.

Brothers and sisters, I’ve always believed that our faith in Jesus Christ on earth is something greater and grander than coming to church. We all know that deep inside that we were created for more than that. The tragedy of life in Christ is not that it ends so soon, but that we all wait so long for life in Christ to begin. Our faith in Christ on earth is not about our final destination; Jesus’ death and resurrection has already saved us. Our faith in Christ on earth *is about how we walk on the path on our journey to our final destination*. Walking with Jesus in the new life he has given us can be just as full of glory as our final destination. So let us put off the old self and put on the new self and walk in Christ with purity with our eyes focused on Jesus because we know Jesus and Jesus knows us, as we face the mighty rivers of life filled with hazards and unknowns and mysteries currents and dangers around each bend, all the while passionately proclaim the glory of God in Christ for the joy of all people. Amen? Amen!

*But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. Isaiah 43:1-3*