

Walk the Line

Eph. 4:17-32

Series “Ephesians”

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I love all kinds of music. My favorite genre outside of praise and worship of course, is country. And one of the all-time greats of country music...someone I love listening to especially when the mood is right is none other than the man in black, Johnny Cash.

Love his voice...love the stories he tells with his music. I just recently watched a documentary on June Carter Cash, and it got me thinking again of Johnny and his life. If you know anything about him, you know he was a complex man that battled addictions throughout his career, but in the end was singing at Billy Graham crusades and sharing his testimony of faith in Christ.

He actually has the words of Psalm 19:14 inscribed on his tombstone: “Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.”

Just last year, they unveiled a statue of him in our nation’s capital recognizing him for his significant achievements in the entertainment industry.

Don’t know if you are aware of this or not, but each state gets two statues in Statutory Hall in the Capital Building and representing Arkansas is the civil rights activist, Daisy Bates and Johnny Cash, the first musician to receive this honor!

Cash has sold more than 90 million records world-wide. In total he wrote over 1,000 songs. Just coming out of Easter, one of those songs that has made a popular comeback recently is, *Ain’t No Grave*. He had 14 number one hits...the very first one being the song, *I Walk the Line*.

Interestingly, he wrote the song while he was backstage at a concert in Gladewater, TX in 1956. According to his own testimony, he was recently married at the time, and his new wife was at home.

Here he was on the road traveling and had so many temptations coming his way. He desperately wanted to be true to himself, to his wife, to God, and with pen in hand it took all of 50 minutes to write. A verse and the chorus from that song:

**I keep a close watch on this heart of mine
I keep my eyes wide open all the time
I keep the ends out for the tie that binds
Because you're mine, I walk the line**

Cash wanted to be on the straight and narrow. He wanted to be loyal and be able to say “no” to the various temptations that came his way. He wanted to “walk the line”.

That’s the title I’m taking for the message today out of Ephesians chapter four: **Walk the Line**

Now, we took a little one week break for Easter and paused our study in the book of Ephesians. We are picking it back up today.

For any guest that is here today or maybe you are back after visiting with us from Easter, we are glad you're here and want to catch you up.

Ephesians is a letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to a church that was meeting in the city of Ephesus (that's modern-day Turkey – home of Rocket great, Alperin Sengun – they are playing so good right now! – sorry...bit of a digression!)

This letter is kind of split right down the middle. In our copy of the scripture, we have chapters and verses to help us find our place. Chapters 1-3 are very theological in nature, while chapters 4-6 are very practical in nature.

And so, before Easter, we made the transition to the more practical aspects of this book...and if you are visiting, I really do want you to come back because in this practical portion, Paul talks about:

- how to raise children...
- he talks about what a healthy marriage looks like...
- what kind of friends we should have...
- how to engage in spiritual warfare...

This is really interesting down to earth content that will help us in our daily lives, so don't miss these weeks if you can help it and follow along listening and/or watching on our app if you do miss.

This practical part began in Chapter 4, and Paul called the church to maturity and unity (v. 1-16). There was a corporate element to this...Paul wants the Church to grow into maturity and be unified, but he knows this doesn't happen without all of us who make up the Church – this is the personal element – we've got to do our part.

We must grow up and mature for the Church to be mature. We must fight for unity and do our part to ensure the church stays unified.

This same personal/corporate appeal is going to be made in the passage we are looking at today as well. And what we see is Paul calling the church from maturity and unity TO purity.

Thus, the message title: **Walk the Line**

Ephesians 4:17-24 – “Now this I say and testify in the Lord (what Paul is about to say here is REALLY important – he is emphasizing his authority as an apostle of Christ...he is saying I am saying this and you can be sure the Lord is stamping his affirmation upon it as well), **that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.** ¹⁸**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.** (Now, Paul just said A LOT there and we're going to

come back to it in just a moment)¹⁹ **They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity** (underline impurity).²⁰ **But that is not the way you learned Christ!** —²¹ **assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus,** ²² **to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,**²³ **and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,** ²⁴ **and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”**

Now, five times in the book of Ephesians – ALL in the second half...the practical part, Paul will use this word “walk” (v. 17 – “no longer walk as Gentiles do”) to describe a lifestyle.

He used the word previously in (Ch. 4:1 – “walk in a manner worthy of the calling...”) and will use it three more times in (ch. 5). Paul is communicating to these believers that they should be living in a certain way.

He wants their lifestyle to be one that is different from the world around them, and in order to show them what he is talking about he draws a contrast between their former way of life (who they were before Christ) and who they are now that they are “in Christ”.

This contrast is characterized between the “old self” they are to “put off” (v. 22) and the “new self” they are to “put on” (v. 24).

Let’s look at the contrast and see what we are to “put off” – this is the “old self”.

Look at how it is described...and let me say this: this is a description of those that are not saved. This is what Paul means when he says, not to walk as the “Gentiles” do. He’s using this term to describe the pagan way of life.

Take notes! First, we see that the “old self” is characterized as having a: **Dark Mind**

Eph. 4:17-18a – “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. (that word “futility” there is the word “worthless” “vain” “empty” – we could say, “it’s good for nothing thinking”) ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding...”

The idea of “darkened” here is spiritual blindness. Like, they just don’t get the things of God.

Look, we all know people like this! We know people – you may be here today and you are book smart, college educated, maybe even have your Ph.D. We know people who can lead a team or organization – they are SHARP!

BUT...when it comes to the plans and purposes of God – nothing makes sense to them! They don’t get it...and don’t desire to.

What is that? That a person who has a dark mind. Paul will call a person with a dark mind who doesn’t understand the things of God a “natural person” – he hasn’t been born of the Spirit.

1 Cor. 2:14 – “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”

Before my brother came to know Christ, I would think about this all the time. How come I get it? Raised in the same house? Went to the same church growing up? Eric was way smarter than me.

How come I get it and it seems so easy to see, but he doesn't? Anyone ever felt that way? It's because the mind is kept in the dark! The light came on for me regarding this when I read:

2 Cor. 4:4 – “In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

Before we “put on the new self”, we had a dark mind. It's only when we by faith trust in Christ that the veil is removed and we can see spiritually.

There is a second characteristic of the person who is still living the “old self” way is that they have a: **Hard Heart**

Eph. 4:18-19a – “They are darkened in their understanding, alienated (excluded) from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. ¹⁹ They have become callous...”

Now, the heart and the mind work together for better or for worse. You might ask, “which one influences the other first?” Does the mind influence the heart or does the heart influence the mind? The answer is, “YES”.

They influence each other, but clearly the process Paul lays out here and in other places (Rom. 1) is that a hard heart feeds and fuels a darkened mind.

Listen to commentator, former DTS professor, **Harold Hoehner** - **“The hardness of their hearts toward God caused their ignorance. Their ignorance concerning God and his will caused them to be alienated from the life of God. Their alienation caused their minds to be darkened, and their darkened minds caused them to walk in the futility of their mind.”**

The idea of hardening here is a picture of calloused skin...dead skin! He even uses that word in (v. 19a) “callous”. It's a word that was used to describe a bone that had petrified.

Goodness...this is the life of someone who is distant from God - they have a hard heart!

And while this describes someone that is still in the state of the “old self”, we need to beware here because the Bible teaches as Christians, that when we refuse to hear the voice of God, our own heart can harden!

Hebrews 3:12-15 – “Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. ¹⁵ As it is said, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”

As Christians, and this is who the message of Ephesians is directed to, we have the responsibility to make sure that our hearts remain soft toward God...and the main means this takes place is through belief and obedience – this is what keeps a soft heart!

Illus. #1 prayer for my children – soft heart!

You choose to live in sin and the “new self” will start looking more and more like the “old self”. There’s a drift that will take place and before long, you won’t even be sensitive to it any longer...that’s a hardening of the heart!

And for the person who is lost, who is unsaved...the person who is clothed in the “old self”, look at what a dark mind combined heart leads to!

Eph. 4:19 – “They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.”

The “old self” ...think about your former way of life previous to having a relationship with Jesus. Does this not describe it a little bit? It certainly described these believers in Ephesus. They had come out of a background of incredible impurity.

If you remember the context of Ephesus, it was described by one commentator as the “Vanity Fair of the Ancient World”.

“Sensuality” or some translations use the word “licentiousness”, it’s flagrant sin. There’s no sense of shame...there’s no remorse. It’s where a person is no longer embarrassed by their sin, but instead they flaunt it.

Paul says, this person is eager to...greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

So, Paul says, “Don’t walk like the Gentiles...don’t live in an “old self” kind of way. And what is that way? I’ll just put it in the form of equation here and it’s a good warning for us.

Dark Mind -> Hard Heart -> Impure Life = “Old Self”

THIS is the “old self”, and Christian, this is not to describe you. You are to look different than this...you are to live different than this! This “old self” is who we were! That’s NOT who we are anymore.

Remember, you are “in Christ”, and this is what Paul reminds them of in (v. 20-24). Let’s look at it:

Eph. 4:20-22 – “But that is not the way you learned Christ! —²¹ assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus. (Paul says, you’ve been disciplined. You know exactly how you are to live now that you are “in Christ”. And that is...) ²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

So, we see the contrast. “Old self” living is NOT what we’re after...that’s NOT where we want to be. We want to (v. 22) “put off the old self” and (v. 24) “put on the new self” – and doing this starts with what I’d call right thinking.

Listen: If you don’t want to live in an “old self” kind of way, then you have to have a “new self” kind of thinking. “New self” thinking leads to “new self” living – that’s what (v. 23) tells us here. We are to be “renewed in the spirit of our minds”.

I’ve said it before, and I’ll say it again: The battlefield for our life is in the mind. Christian, if you want to “walk the line” and live a pure life...if you want to live a life that is pleasing to the Lord as listed out in (v. 25-32 which we’ll get to in just a minute), it starts with right thinking!

It starts with understanding WHO you are “in Christ”. This is what Paul has been hammering in this letter. This is who you are and what you have “in Christ”, so live like it!

Let me put this in bold for you: **“New Self” thinking leads to “New Self” living.**

The mind is where this all starts! Now, this idea of putting off the old self and putting on the new self is a word picture of taking off old clothes and putting on new clothes.

Illus. Closet – In my closet, I’ve got a big side and a small side. I’ve got old clothes and new clothes and let me just tell you sometimes the old just fits better...it’s good and worn and when I clean my closet, I don’t want to depart with the old sometimes!

Paul says here though, when it comes to the Christian life, there isn’t anything good about the old! Get rid of it!

I’ll never “put off” the old and “put on” the new until the battle is won in my mind. “New self” thinking leads to “new self” living.

This is why Paul wrote in: **Rom. 12:2a – “Don’t be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind...”**

Colossians is kind of a twin letter to Ephesians. Listen to what Paul writes in **Col. 3:5-10 – “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you (this is “old self” living): sexual immorality,**

impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸ But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.”

Notice...this is a demand – we don’t have a choice in this matter. Se are to “out off the old” and “put on the new”. It’s a decision we make to live out WHO we are “in Christ”.

Illus. I have decided to follow Jesus – “the world behind me, the cross before me.” – this is a choice we make! It all starts with the mind!

“New self” thinking leads to “new self” living, and Paul describes what this “new self” living looks like. Look at it in (v. 25-32).

Eph. 4:25-32 – “Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. ²⁶ Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil. ²⁸ 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. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ 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. ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

You want to know what “new self” living looks like? Here’s how you can know you are “putting off the old” and “putting on the new” – it can all be determined by the health of: **Our WORDS and our RELATIONSHIPS.**

EVERY action listed out in (v. 25-32) has to do with one of these two things: our words and our relationships to others.

When we have put off the old self and put on the new self, we will:

- (v. 25) – not lie to others and speak what is true...
- (v. 26-27) – not let our anger get the best of us...
- (v. 28) – not steal, but instead be a hard worker and be honest so that we can help those in need...

- (v. 29-30) – speak encouragement and life over others, not corrupt, impure talk that grieves the Spirit of God...
- (v. 31-32) – we won't be full of bitterness and wrath and anger, but instead we'll choose to be kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving...

Talk about walking the line! Eph. 4:25-32 is it...BUT this “new self” living will never happen apart from “new self” thinking.

Would you pray with me?

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.