

Record of Sermons delivered during the month of
October 2019

(added progressively after each Sunday)

(see following pages)

Christian Living (A)

based on: S Olyott

(Review of last week)

The Apostle Paul has been emphasising that Christians live differently from other people around them. Already in the context of the local church – unity in Christ – he has shown that we are to behave differently with each other from the way the unconverted behave to each other. Later (chapter 5) he will explain that we will behave differently in the ‘world’.

But now (Chapter 4:17-32) he introduces three elements of teaching on Christian Living:

- Why this teaching is to be taken seriously.
(verse 17) ¹⁷ *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.* The association between the Greek translated as ‘testify’ and the Greek translated as ‘must no longer’ demands that we understand that Paul is **insisting**, commanding, not merely suggesting, that we *no longer walk as the Gentiles do!* But who is he to be insisting?

Yes, he is an Apostle. More than that. The Apostle specifically and powerfully commissioned by Christ Himself to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles. By and large that is specifically to us! Nor should we ignore the words ‘in the Lord’. Christ Himself is speaking through this Apostle. That is the authority of the Apostles. He who is sent is as He who sent him. Apostles (meaning ‘he who is sent’) have the full authority of Christ. He Himself said so!¹

It is Christ insisting, that we be different. The supreme reason for us to take this teaching seriously.

[A reflection on ‘mortal man’ is that if Jesus should appear in a vision (which He will never do) saying these same words, we would accept them more readily. These words that couldn’t be more plain: *you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, ...*]

It is Christ who insists that you take notice. If you want to know the will of your Lord for your life. This is the passage.

1 Read John 13:20 – ²⁰ *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.* ; Luke 10:16 – ¹⁶ *“The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.”* ; Matthew 10:40-41 – ⁴⁰ *“Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.”* ⁴¹ *The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward.* ; and especially John 14:23-26 – ²³ *Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”* ²⁴ *Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me.*

²⁵ *“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you.”* ²⁶ *But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.*

But there is a second reason for it to be taken seriously. At verse 30, Paul pauses 'in mid flight' to add: ³⁰ *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*

He told us in Chapter 1, that the Holy Spirit – the Person – living in us, is the 'seal'². On the last day this 'seal' – of the presence of the Spirit – will be the identifying 'mark' of each true Christian. In Romans 8:9 Paul made this very specific: ⁹ *You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.*

Since the Holy Spirit lives in you, if you live in an unholy way, there is a serious inconsistency in your life! Is it too much to say that you grieve the Holy Spirit? Imagine the situation (perhaps in a far gone age – perhaps not) where a 'street urchin' is salvaged from a slum and raised in a fine family only to return to their former condition when they grow up. Would there not be grief in that nurturing family?

The Holy Spirit comes into a Christian as He converts them. Yes. He is the very cause of their new existence. We dare not cause Him to grieve.

The teaching of this passage must be taken seriously, lest we 'fly in the face' of Christ and grieve His Holy Spirit.

- Why Christians cannot live as other people.

(Verses 17-24) Before we consider Paul's specific words we could summarise his argument as follows:

- because you are different;
- non-Christians behave in a certain way because they think that way;
- our minds have been changed so we are a 'new self'.

(verses 17-19) We learn how the unconverted 'tick'. Their behaviour is a consequence of *the futility of their minds*. Their minds are set on things of no real value: possessions, position, prestige, pleasure, power (five "p"s). While they seek their own ease and fame if they can get it – otherwise notoriety! At the judgement these are of no value.

(Verse 18) While we have a different scale of values and cannot live as the unconverted do, ⁸ *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.* This is why an unconverted scientist can look at the amazing creation (in all its intricacy and balance) and whereas the Christians bows down before the Great Creator, worshipping Him for His design and loveliness, the other sees nothing! The unconverted – far away from God, can have none of the spiritual blessings – by their very nature they are ignorant of God. One does not become unconverted we are born that way – ignorant of God and His blessings. It is the

2 Paul's earlier life in the sea port of Tarsus, had shown him the merchants' way of identifying the goods they sent to other ports by a special 'mark' their individual 'seal'.

blindness of the petrified (hardness) of the 'fallen' heart, that is incapable of being spiritually aware (discerning). Their outward actions are determined by such hearts that are devoid of God.

(verse 19) What is on the 'inside' shows on the 'outside': ¹⁹ *They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practise every kind of impurity.* They are essentially self-centred and self-seeking. They may be aware that some behaviour is 'unclean' but this awareness will not discourage a greedy following of their 'desires'. To some degree social pressure may inhibit the **action** they admire but this is still reflected in their **speech**.³ Their code of behaviour leaves God out!

A Christian cannot live like that.

(verses 20, 21) Here we have another great "but" in Ephesians. 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, ...*

Becoming a Christian is not just learning a set of propositions, but learning Christ. Not just about Him, but experiencing the Person.

And from Christ you do not learn to be like the unconverted. If you live like the world, no matter what name you claim to yourself, you are not a Christian.

(verse 22) What is it you learn from personal experience of the Lord Jesus Christ? ²² *to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ...* That is to turn from your old ways: repentance. Without repentance you cannot be a Christian. Then (verse 23) you are inwardly renewed – *in the spirit of your mind ...* Therefore since your outward actions reflect the spirit of your mind, you cannot be the same as you when when unconverted.

Also (verse 24) ²⁴ *and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.* You are **remade** in the likeness of God. Adam, before his fall, was first made in the likeness of God. Now through the 'new Adam', Christ Jesus, we are remade in that same likeness. The spirit of the mind now longs for holiness and righteousness to become true.

A superficial reading of this part of the passage may suggest that Paul is saying that when they receive his letter and hear his command they will 'put on' and 'put off' as an act of their own will. But careful attention, shows that he is talking about when they first came to learn Christ. This all came to pass then. Through their coming to Christ. And NOT by 'an act of their own will'!

Therefore you can't live as you did, because 'coming to Christ' changes you to the 'new self', with a new 'spirit of the mind'. A moral transformation in the life lived. Evidence of which is evidence of the cause. The new nature (if you have it) is proved by the new life.

³ There is a caution here for Christians in the choice of TV and other visual entertainment. Many are the sins depicted, which we wouldn't 'dream' of emulating, but it is unworthy of a Christian and dangerous to feed the mind on them.

- Specific ways in which a Christian life is different.
(verse 25) Not to lie in any form. ²⁵ *Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbour, for we are members one of another.* Lying is always harmful, never helpful. Especially between Christian members of the 'body of Christ'.

John Chrysostom – an early Archbishop of Constantinople, uses the following, member of the body, illustration. You are walking along and the 'eye' sees a dangerous snake in your immediate path. But says to the 'foot', "There's no danger!" So you tread on the snake and the body dies.

Then there is the sort of lying where in a religious setting, the letter of the law is obeyed but the spirit of the law is forfeited. A Jewish family might believe that they should do absolutely no work on the Sabbath. They understand that they break the law if they turn on a TV during Saturday. So they leave the TV on from before sunset on Friday.

(Verses 26, 27) As well as lying, put away sinful anger. 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.* Righteous anger is acceptable. Jesus was angry on several occasions. Be angry only at the things God is angry with. And even justified anger should not last longer than nightfall. A child comes home late and you have been worried or someone in the family lets you down. Resolve it quickly, otherwise you may brood on it. Give way to bitterness and even malice. Finally unforgiveness, which the devil can exploit to nobody's benefit.

(Verse 28) Stealing is obviously wrong. ²⁸ *Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labour, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.* However, the Bible definition of 'stealing' is stronger than what we might have assumed. Stealing: acquiring anything other than by a gift or your own labour. Meet your needs by honest toil, and not only your needs but also the needy. The divine purpose of labour is to be able to give.

(Verse 29 & 31) Why did God give the gift of reasoned speech. Why not just essential communication like the animals. 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. ...* ³¹ *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.*

The gift of speech, is for the welfare of others. Speak only what others need to hear: that will be helpful to them – especially in order to bring them closer to God. *Give grace to them that hear.*

Therefore we avoid bitter words which in the final analysis only serve to project our own hurt feelings. Rage similarly is but an expression of personal frustration. Typically then the changed life of a true Christian minimises one's own self interest.

(Verse 32) Replace all that with kindness, compassion and forgiveness. ³² *Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.* At the end of this passage Paul brings us back to focus our

attention on the Cross! Reminding us of what Christ has done for us. (Go forth and do likewise.)

[1898]

May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.

Christian Living (B)

based on: S Olyott

(Review of last week)

Paul's letter began with three chapters establishing the doctrine of Christian Living. Then from Chapter 4 to the end of the letter, he describes their outcome in the practical details of such a life.

Christians can't live the same way as other people! In fact, true Christians do not live like others because they cannot. They cannot because they are new (changed) creations. Firstly they live differently with other Christians – last week's passage, but also with the rest of the world. During the rest of the week and not just for a short time on Sundays.

This is the 'burden' of today's sermon. There will be an introductory explanation and then three points to follow:

Introduction:

The Christian Life is a 'Walk' not a frenetic set of stops and starts. Not bursts of keenness let down by bouts of malaise, but a steady, constant walk. Perhaps the 'hare and the tortoise' comes to mind. There is a sense of continuity about walking, whereas to run (while more dramatic – "look at me") is to tire. Walking allows constant, steady progress. Allows you to go on and on and on. To in fact 'persevere' in the Christian Life.

Paul advises walking. Verse 2: *walk in love*; Verse 8b: *Walk as children of light* Verse 15: *how you walk – with wisdom*.

In fact these are our three points to discuss: Walk in Love, Walk as children of light, And Walk in Wisdom.

1. Walk in Love (Verses 1-7) While some find these verses confusing, they are actually beautiful in their simplicity. Consider this simple 'picture'. (Verses 1 & 2) Here is a group of children – *beloved children* – they all belong to the same family – God is their father. They are walking together along a certain path. But which path? Follow Father – *be imitators of God!*

Paul has captured Jesus' meaning in the Sermon on the Mount. Follow the Father, who is kind and just to all – the just and the unjust – alike. Christ reveals the secret of living a Christian Life: *You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.* (Matthew 5:48) Go the way your Father goes – follow Him.

Of course, children in the same family, even when following their father will bicker among themselves. Paul's answer is the model of Christ's love: in that He gave

Himself up for us, in so doing pleasing the Father. The Greek word Paul uses is *Agape*. That love that Christ displays. A giving, sacrificial love, for the benefit of the receiver even at the cost of everything to the giver. Christ's love as shown on the Cross: not only for His people, but also a *fragrant offering to God*. "You children", says the Apostle, "as you walk behind the Father, love (agape) one another even if it cost everything and above all seek in this way to please the Father."

(verse 3) "Father", says one, "look at those people over there. They're walking a different way: immorality, impurity greed."

"Don't even talk that way! How could my children go that way? It's not fitting that you who have been made holy (that is the saints) should contemplate any different way to walk." ³ *But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.*

(verse 4) "Ah!". says one of the children, "Those other people are walking the way of filthiness." Talking foolishly. The talk of fools. (A 'fool' in the Bible is one who talks as though there is no God, refusing to recognise that when we talk we do so in the presence of God.) And crude jesting: enlisting humour in the 'service of sin'. How can a follower of the Holy God talk like this? What should come from Christian lips: is thanks!

(verse 5) Those who tread the path of immorality, and set their hearts on things (covetousness), find those things then become their idols. That road does not lead to the Kingdom of God and of Christ.

(verse 6) But the 'world' says to us "Come on. Join us. Walk like us. No harm will come of it!" But the Apostle says that the *empty words* that the world uses commend the very sins that God is certain to judge. The children who do not follow the Father are the children (*sons*) of *disobedience*. That is the certain path to damnation. The children who follow Father (verse 7) therefore have nothing to do with disobedience – even though once they also walked in 'darkness. (verse 8a)

2. Walk as Children of Light (verse 8b -14)

That the children once walked in 'darkness' was introduced at the beginning of verse 8. But now they walk in the light!

Guidelines for safe practice when orienteering would advise: not to walk on an unfamiliar, potentially dangerous path in the dark. When dusk descends, pitch camp and await the 'morning light'. That path might look acceptable in daylight but never at night. Unconverted people walk their life in an unsafe way because they are permanently 'in the dark'. Spiritual darkness! In the dark about who God is; about the need for and the only method of, salvation – spiritually blind. They are walking in the darkness (verse 8a) **as you once were**. The unconverted cannot see what the right way to go is. So they stumble on. Yet the children who follow the Father do not so stumble because they are the light. It is illogical that they, being the light, can follow paths that are clearly seen to be fatally dangerous. The 'children of light' can no longer walk the world's path that

they once trod in darkness.

(Verse 9) ⁹ *for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true, ...*
Good, right and true. Perhaps we could take the first letter of 'good', the first two of 'right' and the first of 'true'? We get **Grit**. Another name for 'perseverance'. An outcome of the fruit of being children of light. Which is further commended in verse 10, where the children are to seek to discern what is pleasing to the Father, who is Himself the source of all Goodness, Righteousness and Truth. It takes Grit to persevere in this way.

(Verse 11) The children are to have nothing to do with other worldly paths, in fact they should recognise and expose⁴ such paths for the sin they lead to.

The way to expose folly is to let light shine on the proposed path. The light of morning would expose a dangerous precipice. (verses 12 & 13)
Christians as they walk their path, bring disgrace to sin by living a life of light. Only light dispels darkness. Only light shows up a dangerous path.

Don't rant against sin, but display a life lived in and of the light. The best way to dispel darkness is not to curse it but to light a candle. Live a life of light which will show up the folly of taking any other path except God's. One holy life at the workplace will do more than all reproof, that is not matched by a holy life. While most comes from one holy life matched to winsome words.

Are you puzzled by verse 14? It is derived from Isaiah 60:1, where it foreshadows the 'light' of Christ's salvation. But it is modified. It forms an early church hymn used at Baptism. Already in use when Paul was writing. At Baptism we are 'signed' and 'sealed' as having died (are sleepers) with Christ and then have risen in newness of life with and in His Resurrection (arising from the dead). Henceforth the light of Christ is on us and shines from us. In this way Paul is reminding the relatively new Christians at Ephesus – for whom their baptism was a recent experience – that his letter is not breaking new ground. They have been Christ's light from the beginning of their Christian Life.

At the beginning of Christian Life it is clear that this life is about dying to sin and walking in newness of life. A life that is lived in that light.

So far then we have: Walk in Love and Walk in Light.

3. Walk in Wisdom (Verses 15-20)

Think carefully about how you walk. Think and plan ahead. Be not taken unawares. We now have Apostolic advice on how not to go down the path that the unconverted do.

(Verse 16) ¹⁶ *making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.*

4 Earlier translations used instead of 'expose', 'reprove'. In such a case it would have been necessary to caution the Christian walker not to adopt a holier than thou attitude through a self righteous reproof. In the light of the more generous, recent translation, we might recognise the motive that would apply should we find a person about to unconsciously follow a notoriously dangerous mountain path that would certainly be fatal. In love we would seek to dissuade them by taking this action by exposing that danger to them. But not to berate them for their folly as 'reprove' might infer.

Idleness leads people into sin. The devil finds work for idle hands. Unplanned time can invite temptations. You came home from some activity not having a plan or purpose for when you would get there. Perhaps you expected to just 'see what happens'. This sounds very like 'pagan talk'. Could this expose you to unnecessary risk?

Make positive use of all opportunities by planning for them. Thinking ahead: that is, considering where to 'put your next step' in your wise walking.

(Verse 17) To avoid being foolish in your use of time, make an effort to find what is God's will for you to do. Prayerful attention to His revelation in Scripture, would be a good start.

(Verse 18) Anything that causes us to lose control and 'blows our mind' is covered by the example here. Some might say, "That doesn't apply to me because I only drink beer to excess!" Such a response misses the point. Anything that causes us to not be in charge of our thoughts and actions is condemned as being the way that the 'world' walks.

But, slipped in, as it were, at the end of that verse is Paul's principal advice for Walking with wisdom: *but be filled with the Spirit.*

In the New Testament, we find several times the Holy Spirit sovereignly taking over saints in a special way for a special purpose of that time. But that is not the way 'the Spirit' is applied here. The command to be filled is a:

- plural command – that is for all Christians;
- passive command – that is something that is to happen **to** you;
- present command – that is it is to happen to you continually.

So Paul is effectively saying, "Go on letting yourself be filled with the Spirit." The four participles (qualifying the verb, 'filling') that follow are telling you that when you're 'filled with the Spirit' 4 things will happen to you:

- Verse 19: You will be **speaking praise** among your brothers (the fellowship) with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs – breaches of fellowship can be caused by one person not being filled with the Spirit.
- Verse 19: Singing, **making melody** in your heart, to the Lord. God will be great in your mind and you'll be full of praise to Him – all spiritual coldness is from not being filled with the Spirit.
- Verse 20: Always **giving thanks** for everything, unto God the Father, in the Name of Jesus Christ – all moaning is caused by not being filled with the Spirit.
- **Submitting yourself** to one another out of reverence for Christ. Considering all others to be better than yourself – all feelings of being a 'cut above another' are due to not being filled with the Spirit.

To sum up: If you want to know how to live the Christian Life. Be filled with the Spirit.

How?

Paul refers in this passage to 'filled with the Spirit' in verse 18, as an immediate alternative to being drunk with wine. So we note the lesson. How do you become debauched by wine? By drinking, drinking, drinking and then drinking some more, until it takes control!

The lesson: How are we filled with the Spirit? Go to the Spirit Giver, drink, drink, drink and drink some more until the element which the Spirit Giver gives, **takes control!**

Jesus said: (John 7:37-39) *"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"* ³⁹ *Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*

Being filled with the Spirit is a matter of constantly drinking – feeding on – Christ. Prayer; study of the Word; Christian fellowship; the 'breaking of bread'; spiritual exercises; devotional life; communal devotional life – together as a fellowship; spiritual priorities – walking with Christ. When that happens you find fellowship, worship, thankfulness, mutual submission, holiness.

We have a marvellous picture of what a Christian should be like in this chapter.

- Trying to please God, that's why the last phrase is *out of reverence for Christ*⁵.
- Living for the fellowship, that's why the last verse begins *submitting to one another*.
- Obviously different from others. *They're drunk with wine and we're filled with the Spirit*.

With all this spiritual life fed by the Spirit Giver.

Our Christian lives are far from what they should be. We'll only walk better when we walk closer with the Lord Jesus Christ.

[2194]

May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.

5 NKJV has 'God', but with the footnote 'Christ'.

Delivered Sunday 20th October 2019

Delivered Sunday 27th October 2019