

# P.S.

**L**AST MONTH we looked at different types of walking, physical and spiritual, and saw that Paul had much to say about this in his letter to the Ephesians. We considered two passages that talked about a walk of humility, love and unity. This month there are three further passages to consider, which bring out more aspects of the walk of discipleship.

In another passage, Paul makes a contrast with other types of walk, which must be avoided: “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” (4:17, 18).<sup>\*</sup> The walk of the Gentiles is aimless; it is a midnight walk conducted without the aid of moonlight or torches, a walk of alienation and ignorance, both of destination and of route. Picture someone randomly and aimlessly lumbering about, moving their limbs but achieving no good purpose as they totter about. This is what it is like to have no spiritual meaning and goal in one’s life, to be ignorant of or to ignore God’s great plans.

What is needed for disciples, then, is a walk very different from this. Paul defines it in the next chapter: “at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord” (5:8-10). A walk of light (as opposed to one of darkness) would be one of assurance and direction. There would be no fumbling, no need for tentativeness; instead an ability to go in the right direction to the place where one wants to go.

And as the disciple strives to walk in that kind of way, he must “try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord”. This concept of discerning ties right into the metaphor of both passages. In contrast to the aimlessness and the gloom of the Gentile walk, the disciple has illumination. But he still needs to look where he is going—to focus his vision, in other words—as he peers into the Word of God and the circumstances of his life in order to discern what is the spiritual course to take.

A few verses later he returns to the walking metaphor. He has been talking about alertness—about the importance of being awake rather than asleep—and he presents the challenge (which many scholars take to be a quotation from an early Christian hymn or

## Walking and standing

some such): “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you” (v. 14).

The quotation highlights a natural inclination to laziness and spiritual sloth. It is all too easy to be lulled back to the stupor of a Christ-less existence, to be intoxicated by the inebriation of the world. But we who are disciples are done with being spiritually dead, or at least we ought to be. And so Paul continues: “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (vv. 15-17). Attention must be given both to our intended destination (and making sure that it is firmly at the forefront of our minds) and to our *deportment* as we head there (“*how* you walk”). And we need to maximise our use of time.

In conclusion, the fivefold reference to walking in Ephesians 4 and 5 which we’ve been looking at in this and the previous PS is complemented by a contrasting note in chapter 6. Paul moves the metaphor from *walking* to *standing*. Yes, there is a need to walk, for we all have somewhere very special to go to as we head towards the Kingdom and follow in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus Christ. But there is also a sense in which we must stay put, sure and firm in the gospel truth that we have come to know. This is brought out in Paul’s shifting of the metaphor to *standing*. He uses it repeatedly in his introduction to the famed description of the armour of God: “Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore [having adorned yourself with the component pieces of the armour of God]” (6:13-17).

There are perhaps two senses in which we might think of this standing. One is that of standing firm *in* and *for* something; the saving doctrines that we have come to know, as we gladly take our place to bask in the love and grace of God. A second is that of standing *against* something; *withstanding*, in other words, the oppositions of other teachings, philosophies and lifestyles that might threaten to entrap us and lead us back to evil things and the ignorance we once left behind. The armour of the Spirit is central to this task.

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\* Quotations from the ESV.