

# Walking with Christ

Isaiah 51:17; Ephesians 5:1-20

March 1, 2020 • Rev. Nollie Malabuyo • BSCC

Dear Congregation of Christ: Remember the popular Christian fad in the 1990s called “What Would Jesus Do?” abbreviated as WWJD? It became a personal motto for many to remind them to act in any situation as if they were Jesus. In its heyday, WWJD was inscribed in bracelets, necklaces, rings and T-shirts. This 1990s fad was only a resurgence of a 1896 book by Charles Sheldon with the subtitle “What Would Jesus Do?” Sheldon was a Congregationalist pastor who was a socialist, teaching that Jesus is a mere moral example. His teachings later formed what is now called the social gospel that focused on fighting injustice, poverty, racism, war, environmental abuse, and other issues that we now know as “progressive.”

Long before Sheldon’s book, the 15th century Catholic theologian Thomas a Kempis wrote *The Imitation of Christ*, arguably the most well-known devotional book ever written. He bases his devotional on the New Testament’s calls for Christians to be like Christ, such as verse 1 of our text today, “*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.*” Clearly, there is nothing unbiblical about imitating Christ, or about fighting injustice, poverty, racism, environmental abuse and other evils in the world. There is nothing wrong in teens inquiring what Christ taught about purity, loving the unlovable, helping the poor, or getting justice for the oppressed.

What is lost in this social justice movement is what Christianity is all about: preaching the gospel of Christ to all who are in the hearing of God’s Word. WWJD is focused more on the doing than in the preaching, rather than the reverse. Jesus himself questioned this false gospel, “*For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?*” (Mark 8:35-36). The salvation of the soul is eternally more important than feeding the body. Therefore, WWJD should instead be WDJD, “What DID Jesus Do?” Eternal salvation is all about Jesus who “*gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*”

Why must we imitate God and his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ? Because we are his beloved children. If God is our heavenly Father, we must evidence the same attributes. And if we are brothers and sisters of Christ, we must also evidence his virtues in word, thought and deed. Paul continues from the last chapter where he says that God has given us a new wardrobe of righteousness to get rid of our filthy wardrobe of sin.

As imitators of God and Christ, we therefore must walk with God and Christ in two ways. First, we are to **Walk in Love**. Second, we are to **Walk as Wise**.

## WALK IN LOVE

To imitate God and Christ, we are to “*walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us*” (verse 2). Just as Jesus’ love for us is so great that he gave his life for us on the cross, we are to walk in sacrificial love for our brothers and sisters in Christ. In what ways are we to do this? Paul lists three, even if negatively.

First, do not commit **sexual immorality and impure acts**. In Scripture, sexual immorality is all sexual relationships outside of marriage, and also and outside of a man-woman relationship. Therefore, this prohibition includes adultery, sex between unmarried couples, homosexuality and incest. Paul commands us to “*flee from sexual immorality... [for] the sexually immoral person sins against his own body... [which] is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you*” (1 Cor 6:18-19). Sexual immorality then is an offense against the holiness of the Spirit of God.

Though impurity may refer to impure thoughts, words and actions such as hate, malice and lack of compassion, it most often implies sexual immorality. Paul says that impure hearts lead to the dishonoring of their bodies (Rom 1:24). He often lumps, “*impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality*” together (2 Cor 12:21; Gal 5:19; Eph 4:19; Col 3:5). He declares that abstaining from sexual immorality is the will of God, who “*has not called us for impurity, but in holiness*” (1 Thess 4:3-7). The evil, God-hating world-system in all of human history is represented by a harlot who has “*a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality*” (Rev 17:4).

The second way we are to walk in love for our brothers and sisters in Christ is to avoid “***filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking***” (verse 4). Earlier, Paul warns against “corrupting talk” that does not build others up (4:29). Again, he urges us to put away “*anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth*” (Col 3:8). What is the root of a filthy mouth? Jesus tells the Pharisees that it is their sinful hearts, “*How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks*” (Matt 12:34; 15:18-19). Therefore, let us not put our brothers and sisters down with careless, mocking, hateful and hurtful words, but with words of love, compassion and with praise and thanksgiving.

As well, we are to avoid foolish talk, fake news and lies, and dirty jokes. All this sinful speech is found in all kinds of social networks and news media, and movie and TV entertainment. Wicked celebrities’ and politicians’ words are all filth, foolishness and crude jokes. They twist and mangle the Bible to promote the murder of unborn and even newly-born infants, sexual immorality, homosexuality, transgenderism, climate change, socialism, wokism, excessive taxation, political correctness, and open borders. These are not merely political issues, but they are moral issues prohibited by the Ten Commandments.

These are not only manifest nonsense, but they provoke “*the wrath of God... upon the sons of disobedience*” (verse 6). They not only waste our time but are cause for God’s judgment. Jesus warns them, “*On the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned*” (Matt 12:36-37). God condemns these people because of their approval of such wickedness even when they know that those who practice these things deserve God’s judgment (Rom 1:32).

The third and last way in which we are to love our brothers and sisters in Christ is to avoid **covetousness or greed**. The tenth and last commandment, *“You shall not covet... anything that is your neighbor’s”* (Exo 20:17), summarizes the whole Ten Commandments. Paul repeats this doctrine in Romans 13:9, *“For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,’ and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”* James also teaches the same doctrine, *“For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it”* (2:10). And covetousness, being dissatisfied with what God has given us, is rooted in idolatry. We worship people and possessions in place of God. This is why Paul lumps *“sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness”* as idolatry (Col 3:5).

The problem with some people who claim to be Christians is twofold. There are those who claim that they do not struggle anymore with impure thoughts, filthy words, and covetousness. Do not be deceived, because we all struggle with all kinds of sins, as John says, *“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us... If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us”* (1 John 1:8, 10). Though we are saints chosen and separated by God from the rest of this godless world, we will struggle against sin until death. Holiness is a lifelong process.

Then there are those who agree with unbelievers that Paul’s warnings against sexual immorality, impurity, foolish talk and covetousness are outdated and invalid in our modern, scientific culture. Politicians and celebrities say they have faith and quote the Bible, but they advocate unbiblical and wicked ideas that are listed above. And many who profess to be Christians have no qualms voting for these wicked politicians.

Walk in love for our brothers and sisters in Christ in the same way that he loves us.

## **WALK AS WISE**

The second way that we imitate God and Christ is by walking as wise, and not as foolish (verses 15 and 17). Where is true, heavenly wisdom found? It is found only in Scripture, wisdom that is *“pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere”* (Jas 3:17). But the wisdom of the world is *“earthly, unspiritual, demonic”* (Jas 3:15). The evil world listens to the wisdom of Oprah and David Letterman. Their wisdom comes from Satan the father of lies and deceptions. The Teacher tells us, *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction”* (Prov 1:7). Only in Scripture can we find God’s will for our lives (verse 17). Those who have wisdom from the Holy Bible make the best use of their time because they know that life in this evil world is short (verse 16). So they do not go out with friends who waste hours getting drunk, carrying on with foolish talk and dirty jokes, and dancing suggestively to look for love in all the wrong places at night. They do not dissipate their time on mindless reality shows that are actually out of touch with reality.

Instead, they spend time getting filled by the Holy Spirit by reading and meditating on God’s Word and praying day and night. They do not sing drinking songs and go to rock concerts filled with songs of violence and sex. Rather, Spirit-filled Christians go to worship services in churches where psalms and other spiritual songs are sung together with other Spirit-filled Christians (verse

19). Paul must have been contrasting the pagan worship services in Ephesus with that of the church. And unlike mindless, modern songs that appeal only to the emotions and sentimentality, the Psalms that we sing engage both the mind and emotions, making us wise through Scripture texts. *“Making melody to the Lord with your heart”* also means singing songs filled with heartfelt thanksgiving to God for his love, mercy and grace in saving us from our former sinful self through Christ (verse 20).

Christians are to be filled with the Holy Spirit (verse 18). They are always to be thankful for everything that they have from God, whether in plenty or in want (verses 4 and 20). They avoid sexual immorality, impurity, foolish talk and covetousness, which are all evidences of idolatry. This is evidence that we have spiritual wisdom from God, not the sinful wisdom from the devil.

**B**eloved people of God: Paul gives us one last contrast: that of light and darkness. Christians imitate God and Christ walk in the light of love and wisdom. Unbelievers imitate their pagan idols of sexual impurity, filthy speech, and material and physical lusts. Christians are sinners who have been *“called out of darkness into [God’s] marvelous light”* (1 Pet 2:9). Jesus the true Light came into the dark world, the source of all that is good, right and true (verse 9). But the world did not know him and did not receive him (John 1:10-11).

Paul does not merely say that unbelievers are in darkness; rather, he *calls* them “darkness.” They are the personification of the horrors of hell’s “outer darkness” in their darkened minds, filthy mouths, and demonic practices. We are horrified at what they do in the secret darkness of the night places. They think no one sees, but God’s light will expose their evil darkness on Judgment Day. On that day, they will be like cockroaches running to their hiding places when the light is turned on because they know that their dark deeds have provoke God’s wrath and the day of reckoning has come (Luke 8:17).

Therefore, God calls us to walk as children of light, imitating Christ the only Way, the only Truth, and the only Life. When we see unbridled evil in our culture, we are to expose them with the light of God’s Word as what they are: the evil works of Satan. Paul uses words from the prophet Isaiah when he exhorts us, *“Awake, o sleeper, arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you”* (verse 14; Isa 51:17; 52:1; 60:1). Jesus has brought us out of this dead and dark world into the living light of his Word. He came into the world to sacrifice his broken body and shed blood, so he may bring the fragrance of his once-for-all offering to his Father in heaven (verse 1; Gen 8:21).