

7. Walk

Doubtless you have realized by now that most if not all of the “Little Words” we are studying are rather closely related. They represent, in a sense and to a degree, a way of describing or emphasizing the Christian life. A logical place to begin this study was with the word “come,” giving particular attention to the initial invitations of Jesus, “Come, follow me.” This is also a continuous invitation to all who have accepted His initial invitation.

How deeply grateful we should be that He continues to say to us and others who accept His initial invitation: *I will not only use but also I will multiply every native talent and ability that you have.* In Him we find life at its fullest by living it in service for Him and to our fellowman. We also discover that the fulness of life that is available in Him comes only as we walk or live in fellowship with and in obedience to Him.

The word “walk” is frequently used in the Scriptures to refer to actual physical walking. This is noticeably true in the Old Testament but also in the New Testament, particularly as used by Jesus and in the Book of Acts. An example of its use by Jesus was His word to the paralytic: “Rise, take up your pallet and walk” (Mark 2:9) or “Take up your pallet and go home” (Mark 2:11). When John the Baptist sent some of his disciples to check on Jesus to see whether He was the real Messiah, Jesus told them to go back and tell John what they had heard and what they had seen Him do. He reviewed for them some of the things they had

seen and heard while they were with Him: “the blind receive their sight and the lame walk . . .” (Matthew 11:4-5).

The word “walk” practically always refers to actual physical walking in the Synoptic Gospels. Elsewhere, however, it is frequently used in a figurative sense, with a moral or spiritual emphasis. This is true in the Old Testament but particularly in the Pauline epistles and the Johannine writings. Let us examine some of the places where “walk” is used with a moral or spiritual emphasis.

The Old Testament

There is considerable evidence of the figurative use of “walk” in all sections of the Old Testament: the Law or Pentateuch, historical books, poetic writings, wisdom literature, and the messages of the prophets. We shall call attention to a few Old Testament references.

One of the great summary statements of God’s expectations of or requirements for His people then and now was and is the following (Deuteronomy 10:12-13): “And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I command you this day for your good?” Notice that God’s expectations of them were for their good. This is always true of His expectations of His children.

A couple of other great summary statements of God’s expectations of His people, found in Deuteronomy, are: “So you shall keep the commandments of the LORD, by walking in his way and by fearing him” (Deut. 8:6). Again, it says, “The LORD will establish you as a people holy to himself, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and walk in his ways” (Deut. 28:9). You may want to read through verse 14 and compare it with Deuteronomy 11:22-23. Also, turn back to Leviticus 26:36

to see what God promised His people if they would walk in His statutes and keep His commandments. Notice the connection here of keeping the commandments of God and walking in His way. Do you think these words to the children of Israel are applicable to the nation today? Are we as a people walking in the way of the Lord or in the way that He would have us go?

Some additional references that you may want to check are Deuteronomy 26:17 and 30:16. A few additional references in the Pentateuch where the word “walk” is found are Exodus 16:4; Leviticus 18:3-4; and Joshua 22:5.

The Scriptures report that Amon, a young king of Israel, “forsook the LORD, the God of his fathers, and did not walk in the way of the Lord” (2 Kings 21:22; see also 1 Kings 2:3; 3:14; 8:25). The first verses of the great one hundred nineteenth psalm are (Psalm 119:1-3):

Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who
walk in the law of the LORD!
Blessed are those who keep his testimonies,
who seek him with their whole heart,
who also do no wrong,
but walk in his ways.

The psalmist speaks of walking in his “integrity” (Ps. 26:11). He also refers to some who “walk uprightly” (Ps. 84:11), walking in God’s “truth” (Ps. 86:11). The psalmist also says or claims, “I walk before the LORD in the land of the living” (Ps. 116:9).

Proverbs 14:2 states,

He who walks in uprightness fears the LORD,
but he who is devious in his ways despises
him.

When King Hezekiah was at the point of death and had heard Isaiah’s pronouncement of his death, the king

prayed to the Lord as follows: “Remember now, O LORD, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in faithfulness and with a whole heart and have done what is good in thy sight” (Isaiah 38:3).

Also, Isaiah, sometimes called the “Prince of the Prophets,” represents the people as saying (Isaiah 2:3),

Come, let us go up to the mountain of the
LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths.

Let us examine a little more fully a few verses from Micah (Micah 6:6-8) that represent one of the great summaries in the Scriptures of God’s expectations of His people—the nation but also individuals. It is in the form of a dialogue between the people and the prophet as God’s spokesman. The opening question is (Micah 6:6):

With what shall I come before the LORD,
and bow myself before God on high?

Then follow specific questions whether the Lord will be pleased with abundance of sufferings, climaxed with this question (Micah 6:7):

Shall I give my first-born for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

It is from that kind of background that the prophet says (Micah 6:8):

He has showed you, O man, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness
and to walk humbly with your God.

Orelli, in his commentary on the minor prophets,¹ translated the last line of verse 8 as follows: “And walk obediently with thy God.” Will we not agree that if we walk obediently, we will walk humbly? The *Cambridge Bible Commentary* says, “Humility is the primary religious virtue in the Old Testament.”

Obedience and conformity to the image of God in Christ may be the primary virtue advocated in the New Testament, but a by-product of any attempt to conform to the image of God in Christ will result in a deepening sense of humility. It really seems that the more progress any child of God makes toward conformity to the purpose and will of God but particularly conformity to His nature and character, the more conscious he will become of how far short he falls.

In other words, the best Christians are always humble Christians. They are the ones who know most fully the Father’s expectations of His children. They are the very ones who are most conscious of how far short they fall of being what they ought to be and what the heavenly Father expects them to be. This knowledge should give to all of us as children of God a wholesome degree of humility. But at the same time our consciousness that our heavenly Father will forgive, bless, and use us should save us from a self-defeating sense of sin and unworthiness.

The great summary of Micah that we have just discussed should remind us of comparable challenging statements in some of the other prophets. Some of the most striking were by Isaiah.

You will be challenged if you will read prayerfully some verses from the first chapter of Isaiah, particularly verses 16-20. There are many other challenging statements in the prophets that are more or less closely related to the

¹ Conrad Von Orelli, *The Twelve Minor Prophets* (1977).

ones previously mentioned. For example, Isaiah asks and answers a very challenging question (Isa. 33:14-15):

Who among us can dwell with the devouring
fire?

... He who walks righteously and speaks
uprightly.

Pauline Epistles

As we shift our attention to the New Testament, it seems wise to make a few general introductory statements. While the Old Testament is an integral and important part of our Scriptures, the New Testament speaks the final authoritative word for and to the child of God. The Old Testament, if read and interpreted properly, can and does make a great contribution to the life of the child of God. It must be read and interpreted, however, in the light of the full revelation of God the Father in His Son, who is the exact reproduction of the Father: "He who sees me sees him who sent me" (John 12:45). Also see a number of verses in the great fourteenth chapter of John's Gospel such as verses 7 and 9-11. The preceding means that the authoritative word for the child of God is in the will, nature, and character of God as revealed by the Son and recorded in the New Testament.

Possibly an additional introductory statement should be made about the words translated "walk" in the New Testament. Two are of relatively minor importance for our study. One, *stoikao*, is found in the New Testament only five times. It is translated "walk" in all five places in the King James Version. In contrast, another word, *peruomi*, is found approximately 150 times in the New Testament but is translated "walk" only about a half-dozen times. It is usually translated "go" or "went."

The predominant word translated "walk" is *peripateo*, meaning literally "to walk around." *Peri* is found

in such English words as “perimeter.” With a couple of exceptions, *peripateo* is always translated “walk.” This means that this word, which is used in the New Testament approximately ninety-five times, is translated “walk” more than ninety times. It is used in all portions of the New Testament: twenty-two times in the Synoptic Gospels; thirty-two times in the Pauline epistles; thirty-two times in the Johannine literature, with seventeen of these in the Gospel of John; ten times in John’s three brief epistles; and five times in the Revelation. In addition to the preceding, *peripateo* is found only eight times in Acts and once in 1 Peter. This means that *peripateo* is distinctly, although not exclusively, a Pauline and Johannine word or idea.

Both Paul and John used *peripateo* primarily in a figurative rather than a literal, physical sense. Paul’s emphasis was largely on the moral while John used it more in a general spiritual sense in contrast to literal physical walking. Really, there is so much material in the Bible on “walk” that, as has been true of several other of the “Little Words,” an entire book could be written on the one word.

Now, let us briefly call attention to or underscore a few places where Paul used the word “walk.” There will be no attempt to quote every place where “walk” is found. Those that are included will be given in the order they are found in the Pauline epistles. As you meditate on these words, let them search your soul as I have sought to let them challenge me.

Romans 6:4: “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” Our baptism was and is symbolic. Among other things it portrays or symbolizes the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, but it also is supposed to be a picture or a portrayal of what has happened or is supposed to have taken place in our lives: our death to the old way of life and our resurrection

to live a different quality of life, to walk in the way that the resurrected Christ would have us walk or live.

Romans 8:3-4: “For God has done what the law . . . could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” How much do we, as children of God, walk according to the flesh? And how much according to the guiding impulses of the Holy Spirit?

Romans 13:12-14: “let us . . . cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us conduct ourselves becomingly [“walk honestly,” KJV] as in the day. . . . But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” The best, if not the only, assurance that we, as Christians, will not give in to or gratify our fleshly desires is to walk in the Lord, letting Him have His will and way in and through our lives.

2 Corinthians 5:7: “. . . We walk by faith, not by sight.” Take time to read this verse in its context (2 Corinthians 5:6-10). In verse 6 Paul had said that while we are in the body we are away from, or are not in the presence of, the Lord. That is the background for his statement: “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). While he says that he would prefer to be with the Lord, he makes it his aim while in the flesh to please the Lord. There will come a time when we must all appear before the judgment seat. The more conscious we are of that fact, the more careful we will be about the way we walk or live while we wait.

Galatians 5:16, 25: These two verses and the intervening verses represent one of the most challenging passages in all the New Testament regarding the kind of life the followers of Christ should live. Paul’s admonition was and is: “Walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of

the flesh.” Walking or living under the guiding impulse of and in obedience to the Spirit is not only the best assurance any Christian can have that he will not follow or be obedient to the desires of his fleshly nature. It is the only dependable assurance of such a life.

In verses 19-21 Paul lists “the works of the flesh,” and then in verses 22-23 he lists the marvelous “fruit of the spirit.” Listed are “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control,” concluding with “against such there is no law.” There does not need to be any law against or effort to control any of these. Paul concludes that those “who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal. 5:24). Paul closes this great passage on the fruit of the Spirit with a tremendous challenge: “If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.” Incidentally, “walk” is the translation of *stoikao*, found only five times in the Greek New Testament, four of these in Paul’s epistles: Romans 4:12; Galatians 5:25; 6:16; and Philippians 3:16. The other place is in Acts 21:24.

If we laid our lives down by Paul’s expectations, how would we grade ourselves in regard to the fruit of the Spirit? Would my grade and yours be an *A, B, C, D, or F*?

Ephesians 2:8-10: “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” We are not saved *by* works, but we are saved *for* good works, which will be inevitable, at least to some degree, if we walk in the way the Lord wills for us and would lead us.

There are some other references to “walk” or “live” in the Pauline epistles. The following are some to which you may want to give some special study: “Walk by faith” (2

Corinthians 5:7); “lead a life worthy” [“walk worthy,” KJV] (Ephesians 4:11); “walk as children of light” (Eph. 5:8); “look carefully . . . how you walk” (Eph. 5:15); “lead a life [“walk,” KJV] worthy of the Lord” (Colossians 1:10); “walk in wisdom” (Colossians 4:5, KJV); “walk worthy” (1 Thessalonians 2:12, KJV). This emphasis is stressed by Paul rather frequently.

Any major concordance would provide you some additional references in Paul’s epistles to “walk” or “live.” Incidentally, if I were a pastor, I believe I would want to preach a series of sermons on “The Walk of a Christian” or some such subject. But whether you and I ever preach or speak on the Christian walk, we should let what Paul and others say about the Christian walk or life challenge us to live a more consistent life for our Lord and Savior.

Johannine Writings

John’s use of “walk,” as suggested previously, was usually in a more general sense than in Paul’s epistles. Usually in John’s writings it refers to the whole walk or stand of the child of God. As was done with the Pauline epistles, we will call attention to and discuss briefly some but not all of the places where John uses the word “walk,” which in his writings is always, except in some modern translations, the translation of *peripateo*. One reference will be from the Fourth Gospel. Others are from John’s three brief epistles, and one is from the Revelation. These can be challenging and encouraging to us if we will meditate on them and let them speak to us.

John 8:12: “Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’” He was and is the light of the whole world, Gentile as well as Jewish, whether or not He is recognized as that light.

How deeply grateful we should be that we have been brought into union with Him. We do not have to walk in darkness but can walk in the light that comes from His presence. This is a very strong way to state the negative and could be translated: “and we shall in no wise walk in darkness.”

The immediate background for this verse is the incident when the scribes and Pharisees attempted to trap Jesus by bringing to Him a woman they said “had been caught in adultery” (John 8:3). This incident is not recorded in some of the oldest and supposedly among the best manuscripts and is treated differently by various contemporary versions of the Scriptures, but there are few if any incidents in the earthly ministry of Jesus that revealed more fully His love for the sinner without white-washing or overlooking his or her sin.

His closing words to her were: “Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again” (John 8:11). Let us never forget that Jesus wants to and will forgive sin. Too many who claim to be Christians go around defeated because of a sense of unforgiven sin.

1 John 1:6-7: “If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth, but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” Notice again the relation or contrast of light and darkness.

First John is one of the shorter books in the Scriptures, but there are few if any that can be more challenging and at the same time more encouraging to any child of God. A meditative reading of it can be an enriching experience. Before you go on to our brief comments concerning one of the most challenging statements in all the

Scriptures, why not read carefully and prayerfully the intervening verses (1 John 1:8—2:5a)?

1 John 2:5b-6: “By this we may be sure that we are in him; he who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.” The word “walk,” as suggested previously, is a metaphor for “live” and is so translated in some of the contemporary versions. For example, the New English Bible translates 1 John 2:6 as follows: “Here is the test by which we can make sure we are in him: whoever claims to be dwelling in him, binds himself to live as Christ himself lived.”

There are many tremendous challenges in the Bible, but there is none that challenged me personally more several years ago than these words from 1 John. I have used them as the basis for brief devotionals frequently in speaking, particularly to Christian youth. To them I have said, as I have said to myself, “If you will let these brief words really grip you, they will challenge you to the end of life’s journey.” None of us ever walks perfectly or lives perfectly as He lived and as He would have us walk or live. But how grateful we should be that if we confess our failures to walk as he walked, He who understands our weaknesses will forgive us and restore us to fellowship with Him but with new challenges to walk or live as He walked and lived. Will you not agree that the greatest weakness of the contemporary Christian movement is that so many of us who claim to be followers of Christ fall so far short of walking or living as He walked or lived?

1 John 2:11: “But he who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.”

Notice again the contrast of light and darkness. And do not let us forget that we who are Christians can be

walking in the darkness and not in the light. There may be, however, degrees of darkness.

Now without comment, let us call attention to two verses in 2 John and two in 3 John where “walk” or “walking” are found in the King James Version but not translated as such in the Revised Standard Version. In all four places they are a translation of a form of *peripateo*.

2 John 4, 6: “I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it” (KJV).

3 John 3, 4: “For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (KJV).

Peripateo, in some form, is found five times in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 2:1; 3:4; 9:20; 16:15; 21:24). For example, as a part of the message to the church at Sardis, after a message of judgment and a plea for repentance, there is the encouraging word in Revelation 3:4: “Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments,” followed by the glorious promise: “and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy.” Can and do we hope that it can be said of us, “for they are worthy”?

Then in Revelation 21, John describes the “new Jerusalem” (Rev. 21:2). We may not be able to comprehend fully the meaning of the “new Jerusalem,” but the words John uses to describe it are beautiful beyond comprehension by us. We know that God “will wipe away every tear . . . and death shall be no more” (Rev. 21:4). Also, the city will have no need of a sun or a moon, for the glory of the Lord and the Lamb is all the light that will be needed (Rev. 21:23). In that

light “shall the nations walk” (Rev. 21:24). Again, how glorious that “there shall be no night there” (Rev. 21:25).

Whether or not we can understand the Book of Revelation, do we not find ourselves saying with John, as recorded in the next to the last verse in this, the last book in the Bible, “Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev 22:20)?

There are two or three other words that are at times translated “walk.” They are relatively unimportant when compared to *peripateo*. This should be enough to underscore the importance of “walk” in our New Testament and its continuing challenge to you and to me and to children of God in general. Will you agree that the outstanding weakness of contemporary Christianity is the fact that so many church members do such a poor job of living the kind of lives we should live? We fall so far short of revealing in our daily lives the kind of life Jesus lived while he walked among men. The most tragic thing of all is the evidence that so many of us who claim to know Him do such a poor job of walking or living as He walked. And, unfortunately, about all most people know about Jesus is what they see revealed in and by the lives of those of us who claim to be His followers.

Discussion Questions:

1. The New Testament cultures, as with the Old Testament cultures, were essentially walking cultures, as were centuries after and still so in many regions of the world. Does the verb “walk” have theological application in twenty-first century United States?
2. What are some examples of “walking” with God?
3. Why would Maston refer to Isaiah as the “Prince of the Prophets”?
4. Is the “walk” idea from Scripture a new one for you regarding how you express your faith?

5. Has your experience of hearing—even delivering—sermons, lessons, and other oral presentations been that of using more Old Testament texts than New Testament texts for consideration of what practicing faith means?
6. What is your reaction to this statement of Maston’s: “Will you not agree that the greatest weakness of the contemporary Christian movement is that so many of us who claim to be followers of Christ fall so far short of walking or living as He walked or lived?”