

## STUDIES IN EPHESIANS #77

## STEPS TO A GOAL #27

WALK NOT AS GENTILES WALK, IN THE VANITY OF THEIR MIND, HAVING THE UNDERSTANDING DARKENED. 4:17, 18.

Here are some of the reasons why the believer must not walk as Gentiles walk. Their mind is vain or empty. Their understanding or heart is darkened.

We only have to look about us these days to see the utter vanity of the lives of those of the world. People are in a hurry to get nowhere. They try to keep up with the Joneses. They work hard for money to spend to impress the people they don't like. The more they seek for happiness, the less they find of it. Like the Athenians, they are always looking for something new. But this is not to be the occupation of the believer. He is not to walk that way.

In Christendom it is increasingly difficult to get people to go to the churches. The serious pastor discovers that they do not understand. The understanding has been darkened. They cannot grasp the most elementary spiritual truths. Many, like the Corinthians, have to be fed on milk. This is all the outcome of walking in the way of the world. The god of this world blinds spiritual eyes to the truth.

At the first of this chapter, the believer is exhorted to WALK WORTHY...WITH ALL HUMILITY OF MIND. Here he is to WALK NO LONGER...IN THE VANITY OF MIND. There is quite a distance from humility to vanity.

Like the creation, the mind of the old man is subject to vanity. It minds earthly things because such material things are its only experience. The old man, the soulical man, has contact with its surroundings only thru the senses. There is no comprehension of the unseen things that abide. Having no comprehension of God, this old nature in the fool is likely to say, THERE IS NO GOD. With all his inventions, he can get along without God. His foolish heart is darkened.

All too many love the darkness because their deeds are evil. They do not desire light. They hate it and avoid it. When they knew God they did not glorify Him as God. So they have been given over to darkness. They deserved it.

Their thots and imaginations are continually evil. They became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. See the sequence. Darkness follows vanity.

Later on in the epistle we have the request to WALK AS CHILDREN OF LIGHT. This is the walk of the believer in contrast to that of the unbeliever. To walk circumspectly, one needs light. Neither can one walk in love and at the same time be vain in mind and have the understanding darkened.

The saints to whom this epistle is addressed have had their understanding enlightened (1:18). The walk is to be the logical outcome of the doctrine. Enlightened people should walk as such, not as those who are in darkness.

A further exhortation as to walk is found in Ph'p 2:5, LET THIS MIND BE IN YOU, WHICH WAS ALSO IN CHRIST JESUS. This is far from vanity and darkness.

The promise which God made to Abraham was an unconditional covenant. We mean by that, that it was a covenant in which there were no conditions laid down. There were no *if's*. God made the covenant. Abraham said nothing. He was to do nothing as far as the covenant itself was concerned. The terms were;

1. *I will make of thee a great nation.*
2. *I will bless thee.*
3. *I will make thy name great.*
4. *Thou shalt be a blessing.*
5. *I will bless them that bless thee.*
6. *I will curse him that curseth thee.*
7. *In thee shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.* See Ge 12:1-3; 12:7; 13:14-17; 15:13-21; 17:1-22; 18:9-15; 21:12; 22:15-18.

You will note from the above that in all God made 8 covenants with Abraham, but the 7 points set out above sums up all of them.

It is easy to belittle this arrangement God made with Abraham. Paul told the Galatians that the law did not in any way affect the promise. Too often we do not realize that the law was a parenthesis. It was added because of transgressions. It was to be a guide to God's erring people. They were not to be in the dark as to what they should do and what they should not do.

We must not forget that wrapped up in all this is the covenant name Jehovah. Also the fact that Abraham was a Gentile when God made the covenant is not to be overlooked. Paul used that truth as a treat argument against the Jews who were intolerant of the Gentiles who were grafted in. Paul reminded them that Abraham believed while yet uncircumcised, a Gentile, and that his faith was counted unto him for righteousness.

In this promise we can see the basis for the statement that Gentiles were strangers from the promise. It was for Abraham and his seed. But Paul made it clear that a Gentile by faith could become a spiritual child of Abraham and be a partaker of the promise.

What did Abraham do after God made the promise? He believed God.

This promise is not yet finished. Abraham soon began to realize that altho this promise was a very personal one to him, yet it could not be fulfilled this side of resurrection. The child of his old age, when he was as good as dead was a further confirmation of that fact.

So the law was a parenthesis in the outworking of this promise. But there is another parenthesis in which we now live. For the time being the promise has been set aside entirely as God is working out another purpose while Israel gets ready to repent and take up where they left off at the end of Acts.

In addition to being a parenthesis, this present age is the scene of the outworking of God's first and main purpose. Gentiles are being blest today, but not according to the promise made to Abraham. They are blest thru Christ the Son of God and Savior of the world, not as the Seed of Abraham. We do not know Him after the flesh. We have no promise of inheriting the earth but look for heaven itself.

## THE COLOSSIAN LETTER (CONT.)

## HOW STUDY THE BIBLE?

Paul realized that the saints at Colossae were not going to turn against Christ. The danger was that they would misinterpret the Christ. These saints were mature Christians, but not proof against a subversion of the true idea of Christ. So Paul begs them not to abandon the Christ as He was taught them by Epaphras. Paul did not say GOSPEL here, but Christ.

Paul has great concern about this matter and is anxious that they be firmly rooted once for all in the Christ. The only antidote for the poisonous teaching of the Gnostics and Essenes was the knowledge of Christ personal. So Paul desired that they be built up in Him higher each day, growing stronger and stronger thru faith, while remaining true to the lessons taught of old. He prays that they may abound (run over) in all this so that they will be led to pour forth their hearts in gratitude to God the giver of all. No apostle has stressed THANKSGIVING as has Paul. With him it is a refrain.

Then Paul says, BE ON YOUR GUARD! DO NOT SUFFER YOURSELVES TO FALL A PREY TO *certain persons* WHO WOULD LEAD YOU CAPTIVE BY A HOLLOW AND DECEITFUL SYSTEM, WHICH THEY CALL PHILOSOPHY. Philosophers are ever prone to substitute the traditions of men for the truth of God. In this day, if a man is to be ordained a minister, he must have taken a course in this art.

Philosophers enforce an elementary discipline of earthly ordinances fit only for children. They may have a gospel, but it is not the gospel of Christ. If they exalt themselves, which they ever try to do, they dare not give Christ His rightful place and character. But the truth is; in Christ the entire fulness of the Godhead abides forever, having united itself with man by taking a human body (being the last Adam).

And so Paul tells the Colossians, AND SO IN HIM - NOT IN ANY INFERIOR MEDIATORS - YE HAVE YOUR LIFE, YOUR BEING, FOR YE ARE FILLED FROM HIS FULLNESS.

Paul says that Christ is the Head over all spiritual things - call them principalities or powers or what you will: that in Him is the true circumcision - the circumcision which is not made with hands but wrought by the Spirit - the circumcision which divests not of a part only but of the whole carnal body - the circumcision which is not of Moses but of Christ.

Paul says that they have this circumcision because they were buried with Christ to their old selves and were raised with Him to a new life; all this by faith in the powerful working of God who raised Him from the Dead.

These Colossians were Gentiles. At one time they had been spiritually dead, that is, dead to spiritual things. They had their walk in transgressions and in the uncircumcision of their unchastened carnal heathen hearts. But God had quickened them together with Christ. They were now in a new life. Then and there all had been freely forgiven of their transgressions, Jews and Gentiles alike. They have been quickened to a new life, not only here, but there is a promise of life to come in resurrection.

We are getting on dangerous ground when we mention such a subject. There is quite a variety of opinions as how to approach it. But there is one thing in common with most Bible study. That is that some idea must first be formulated and then the Bible used as a cyclopedia of texts from which to draw proof texts. Of course in any given subject, the one who can parade the most imposing lineup of proof texts is conceded to be the authority.

In a 6 year cycle of standard Sunday School lessons, the proof texts are limited to such a portion of the Bible the authors see fit to dish out. Those who study from denominational quarterly magazines never get a chance to see what the whole Bible is and what it has to say. The lessons are *slanted* so as to indoctrinate.

There is this same danger in any dependence upon human expositions. Even among those who rightly divide and who have found the difference between the kingdom and the church, there is a tendency to make some things prominent and to relegate others to the background. Any teacher will do this unconsciously.

So it is all the more good reason that each person should do as much study for himself as possible, not relying on teachers, preachers, or what-have-you. One's relationship to God is a personal matter. It is not getting in the crowd and going where it goes.

No person should hesitate to study the Word for himself. He will find great joy in the study, more than he ever dreamed. But he will run into unpleasant things too. Many pastors do not want their members to carry Bibles to church. Some have said so. All too often God has said one thing and men have said another. That will come out in study, and a choice will have to be made, whether to believe God or to believe men.

An English concordance is a first *MUST* after getting a good Bible (Companion Bible preferred). Just sitting down and looking up all the occurrences of a word is enlightening. But soon that will run into looking up subjects. Then the next *MUST* is a set of Hebrew and Greek concordances (The Englishman's by Bagster). One does not have to know Greek and Hebrew to use them. Now the student is all set to really go to it and study. He will learn some amazing things, such as the fact that *soul* occurs 4 times before the account of the creation of man. There is an endless array of wonderful truth to be dug out as treasure. Now you can see what the method of approach is. It is to go to the Bible, not to prove something, but to learn. I know that this is outlandish and even dangerous. It is an unheard of procedure except in science and other worldly pursuits. But maybe you have heard that the children of this world are wiser than the children of light.

For a change, just try the new approach to see what will happen. It may revolutionize your outlook and thinking, but I believe that you will find it worth while. Use your Bible for a source-book of information, not for proving your ideas, no matter how good they may seem to be. May the Holy Spirit guide you.

## PAUL AND THE ATHENIANS

When Paul came to Athens, it was soon noised abroad that he was a setter forth of strange gods. It seems that he was preaching concerning a man, Jesus, and resurrection. To the Athenian, both these would be gods since they worshipped both abstract ideas and concrete things.

But the Athenian just could not accept the doctrine. Since he believed in the immortality of the soul, he had no need for resurrection. He just went on living anyhow. Also the Athenian believed that *all* men were immortal in this way. So it was unbelievable that God had appointed a Man and approved of Him by raising Him from the dead. And that a man had to be resurrected to be saved, why that was ridiculous! If Paul had told them Jesus was one of the gods and that when they died they would go straight into His presence, they might have given it some consideration.

The Athenians had a heaven. It was a great dome of brass studded with stars and upheld by a giant, Atlas, at the Pillars of Hercules. The abode of their gods was Mt. Olympus (near heaven itself). A heavenly place, then, was a high place in the mountains. The gods placed some of the heroes and heroines in the heavens by making pictures among the stars. Among such were Hercules, Andromeda, Perseus, and the like. So these heroes were heavenly beings.

Now it would not have been offensive to the Athenians to have a certain Jesus, even as a god, placed among the heavenly beings. But the idea of His being God, and having passed thru heaven and being seated on the right hand of a great Father would have been sheer nonsense to them. Furthermore, that human beings should be taken from the earth scene and seated with Him far above all was utterly fantastic. There was nothing beyond the brass dome. Men were made for the earth and that is where they are going to stay. So reasoned the Athenians. The later Pauline epistles would have been unacceptable.

We now realize that the theory of the immortality of the soul was promulgated by the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle. The so-called Christian Church received it from the hands of St. Augustine. So we see that the Athenians could not receive truth because of philosophies and traditions.

Concepts of a hell as a place of torture also originated with the Greeks (altho borrowed from Babylon). They could not tolerate the idea that when men were dead, they were actually dead, for then they would go unpunished for their sins. So a place of punishment was invented and invested with all the exquisite tortures the human mind could devise.

Of course these early Athenians knew nothing of a coming Savior who was to die for the sins of the world and make such an invention unnecessary. Today some believe that Christ died for the godly, but that the ungodly will have to suffer for their own sins. Still others believe that Christ died for all, but that the sins of the ungodly are so great that they have to be avenged twice, in Christ and the person too.

It would be well that we examine our doctrine, whether it be Athenian or Christian.

## THE QUICK AND THE DEAD #6

Not only has the meaning of the words *hades*, *gehenna*, and *sheol* been corrupted by modern thinking, but the English word *hell* has suffered the same treatment. No one is to blame if he has been brot up to believe hell is a place of torment. Rather those who teach such untruths thru fear or ignorance are at fault.

A little research in the English will show that the word *hell* was in reality the word *hale*, *hell*, or *hele* and meant to cover up, e.g., *hale of potatoes*. *Helling* meant to cover a house. *Heleing*, to cover up in bed. And the tailor and the printer had their *hells*, or dark corners to receive their refuse.

If the reader will now connect the meaning of the Greek word *hell* and the original English *hale* or *hell*, there is little to suggest a place of torment. However, popular philosophy has created a *hell*, orthodoxy has appropriated it, and various institutions have taught it. Now, like Darwin's (supposed) theory of evolution, everyone believes it whether it is true or not.

Even my English dictionary is unwilling to accept wholeheartedly the strict meaning of *hell*, for it says, (1) The place of the dead, the grave; (2) Place of the wicked, abode of evil spirits; (3) Evil spirits that dwell in torment, powers of darkness; (4) A place for the gatherings of the outcast. Tailor's or printer's *hell*: a dark corner to receive debris.

With this information it is possible to see the evolution of our word *hell*. Scripture and history have been cast aside for the philosophy of those writers who had their own ideas as to the disposition of the dead. Once those ideas were accepted and their writings introduced into our schools of thot, the true meaning of the grave was lost. If one should delve a little deeper into the writings of the past he would find that Josephus, in his *Antiquities of the Jews* records a Jewish misconception of the unseen world. His predecessors, Plato, Aristotle, and others tried to spiritualize the dead from the grave. These theories were carried over into the middle ages by the philosophers of the *Scholasticism* group and eventually were accepted into theological thinking. The result is that the truth about the grave has been so modified that we have those, as I quoted in last month's article, who in an effort to justify their ideas of the grave, rationalize their thinking till neither logic nor fact remains.

The next step in this philosophical brain washing is to cast doubt on any voice that is raised in protest. This can be seen today, where we have the Bible being regarded as only the inspired thots of men. Any fundamental teacher is branded an outcast or heretic.

Modern intelligence takes pride in that it has uncovered the fallacies of the prophets and the apostles. No doubt modern intelligence could write a better Bible than God has written! The critics can even point out the mistakes Christ made. But the fact remains, you are either quickened in Christ or you are dead in your sins.

## FREEDOM OF THE WILL

The reason man was placed on this earth as a mortal being and subject to temptation was to try him. Obedience must be willing obedience if it is to be acceptable to God. Man cannot be morally upright unless he has a choice.

Cain could have taken the sin-offering which lay at the door and he would have been accepted even as Abel. But he would not.

Not all the Canaanites were destroyed so that Israel might be tested as to whether they would obey God or not (J'g 2:21,22).

Time after time Israel were brot to a place of decision, whether they would serve God or the gods of the nations (e.g., Jos 24:15).

Solomon had a choice. He chose wisdom.

The Jews had a choice. They chose Barabbas rather than the King of the Jews.

Pilate had to make a choice.

To be a disciple, a worthy one, it was not only necessary to choose Christ, but to love Him more than anything on earth.

Esau made the wrong choice and was disapproved.

Saul made the wrong choice and was rejected as king of Israel.

As for Joshua and his house, they chose to serve the Lord.

Demas made the wrong choice.

Ananias and Sapphira made the wrong choice.

Satan also made a wrong choice. Iniquity was found in him. But Satan tries to excuse himself and now declares that God created him as he is. He is somewhat like many today who blame their parents or environment for their misdeeds. This is the old game of *passing the buck*.

Satan has repeated his lie so often that many people have begun to believe it and so they are teaching that not only was he created as he is, but that he is a faithful servant of God! How silly can folks get?

But surely there is something that can be done to make mankind choose the right thing. So reason many. But the heart is vile. It chooses sin. There is no changing it. God manifested His love by the Sacrifice of His Beloved Son, but men reviled and refused the love gift. Some day His wrath will be revealed from heaven, but men will curse and revile all the more. In Isa 26:10 we read, *Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness*. So God's grace, favor, or love will not change the wicked.

Once the Lord wept over Jerusalem. He would have saved them all. But they would not. The Pharisees would not come to Him that they might receive life.

Lazy people and cowardly people do not want to face the issue. They find it hard to choose. So like the unprofitable servant with one pound, they sit and do nothing. Such are of little use to the Master.

*But man does have freedom of choice. There is no excuse.* Fatalism or any other ism can never do away with the fact that *man is what he chooses to be*. God could never judge him upon any other basis. Neither can man blame God for fear or laziness in making choice.

## THE EDITOR'S DESK

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