

Walking like “Gentiles”?

Way back when I was in Elementary School, “padding” was still a common form of discipline. Most of the male teachers, and a few of the female ones, still administered “the Board of Education” themselves. However, many of the older female teachers instead opted for making disruptive student “Go stand in the hall.” Then, the offending student waited outside the door for the Principal who patrolled the halls. I’m told by repeat offenders- since I was rarely out there myself, that they became adept at recognizing various people by their approaching footsteps. Thus the Principal’s gate and pace was soon discerned from the Janitor’s, or other Teachers or faculty. All of which is to get to this: Our “walks” are, or at least soon become, distinctive and easily discerned by others. This is also true of our *spiritual walks*, or manner of life...

Note **Ephesians 4:17-19** in this connection, “*So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.*” From these few verses, let’s emphasize a few relative points.

In the OT, and while it was still “*valid*” (cf. Heb.9:15-18), “*Gentile*” was primarily a designation of race meaning “non-Jewish.” However, its usage in the NT took on a mostly spiritual connotation of “non-Christian” regardless of ethnicity. Thus, “*Gentile*” was used to denote a spiritual “heathen” or “reprobate.”

With this understanding, let’s now consider the specific characteristics particular to the ***Gentile “walk”*** as outlined in our text...

- **“*in the futility of their mind*”**- The Greek word (*mataiotes*) translated as *futility* doesn’t just refer to *emptiness* or *uselessness* as we might expect, but instead conveys “what is devoid of truth and appropriateness, perverseness and depravity.”¹ So the function of the mind isn’t just *futile*, *vain*, and *empty*, it is spiritually perverse and depraved.
- **“*being darkened in their understanding*”**- Far from being “*enlightened*” with the “*true light*” of Jesus Christ (cf. John 1:9) as Paul prayed for the Ephesians (cf. Eph.1:18), their *understanding* has been “*darkened*,” or more literally, *blinded* by Satan, 2Cor.4:4.
- **“*excluded from the life of God*”**- This *depravity of mind* and *blinded understanding* has resulted in their being *excluded*, *alienated*, and thus *separated* from God. Eph.2:12 concludes that such a state has “*no hope and (is) without God in the world.*” But least we begin to think that Satan heaped such a deplorable condition upon them apart from their own desire, input, and culpability, the Spirit quickly adds...
- **“*because of the ignorance that is in them*”**- It is often said, in one way or another, that “being ignorant” is nothing of which to be ashamed, but “staying that way” is another matter entirely. Owing to our parentage and rearing (or lack thereof), our “spiritual education” may indeed be lacking. But as adults, choosing to remain *spiritually ignorant* is entirely our own fault, is a paltry and wholly unacceptable excuse to God, Acts 17:30-31. Thus, the *spiritual walk* of the Gentile is undertaken in *self-inflicted ignorance*.
- **“*because of the hardness of their heart*”**- But why would anyone choose to stumble through life in *spiritual ignorance*? Such is typically not the result of a lack of opportunity to *know* and *do better* as much as having become *hardened* in their

thoughts, desires, and motivations (i.e. their hearts). Thus, opportunities to seek and know truth have been spurned through *stubbornness*, cf. Matt.7:7-8.

- **“and they, having become callous”**- A “callous” is a spot of skin that has lost its sensitivity by repeated exposure to excesses of heat or abrasives. A “calloused” person or heart has lost its ability to be *pricked/pierced* by the gospel’s love and truth (cp. Acts 2:37), or indeed to *feel/discern* their own desperate need of it, having been *“seared in their own consciences as with a branding iron,”* 1Tim.4:2.
- **“have given themselves over to sensuality”**- Again, the all-too-human tendency of laying blame upon others is herein again clearly averted. Those who “walk as the Gentiles” have “given themselves over” to *sensuality*. That is, “each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust,” Jas.1:14; and “whose god” has become “*their own appetite*,” Phil.3:19.
- **“for the practice of every kind of impurity”**- The Greek word (*akatharsia*) translated as “*impurity*” refers generally to “uncleanness,” but in a moral sense it is “the impurity of lustful, luxurious, profligate living.”² So, rather than referring to a righteous man who inadvertently gives in to “a” temptation in a “moment of weakness” and sins, this is one who has given themselves “wholly” to a lifestyle fraught with all kinds of sensual excesses
- **“with greediness”**- And to add the final nail to the shoes which “walk as the Gentiles,” the spiritual impurity, such conduct is committed with an *ever increasing desire* for more and different sensual indulgences. Such is the insatiable appetite of impurity.

Now stop and think for a moment: Does not this “walk of the Gentiles” clearly resemble most of the world today? Please don’t misunderstand. I’m not suggesting that Paul wrote to the Ephesian church in roughly 63 or 64 A.D. to outline the state of the world in 2021. But what I am saying is that “spiritual Gentiles” walk in much the same paths in 2021 as in the latter half of the first century. However, *then as now*, “*you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him*,” Eph.4:20-21! What Paul described to the Ephesian church, and I have highlighted to you, is how the spiritually “*futile*,” intellectually “*darkened*,” positionally “*excluded*,” educationally “*ignorant*,” emotionally “*hardened*,” and sensitively “*calloused*” people walk in “*impurity*” with all “*greediness*.” To NT switch writers for just a moment, John wrote that such distinctions between “*the children of God*” and “*the children of the devil*” are “*obvious*,” 1John 3:10. I whole-heartedly agree. Any minimally observant person can easily discern the difference just by how *they walk*! So, how do YOU walk? Do you share the gate and footsteps of God and Christ Jesus, or the Devil and his cohorts? The difference is probably obvious... perhaps to everyone but you.

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¹ Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon

² *Ibid*