

A Different Way to Walk
Ephesians 4:1

Slide 1

For eight hours, he prepares his uniform and his mind for duty. Every day he gets a fresh haircut.

And when he's on duty, he won't vary from his command a single step, or for a single second, no matter the weather, no matter the hour of the day, no matter the day of the week, no matter the number of people watching, and no matter if no one is watching.

He's an unflinching guard, a member of the Third United States Infantry Regiment of the United States Army, known as the Old Guard.

He's one of the many soldiers, since July 2, 1937, who guard the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery, just outside our nation's capitol.

There's nothing casual about the way this work is done, either. When a sentinel comes on duty, he walks exactly 21 steps across the tomb, representing the 21-gun salute, the highest honor given to any military or foreign dignitary.

When he turns, he faces the tomb, and remains in that position for 21 seconds, then he turns again and walks 21 steps across the tomb.

When he completes the short journey, he stops, turns toward the tomb, and pauses for 21 seconds. Over and over, the sentinel repeats the process, until his shift is completed.

With an average age of only 22, these young, enlisted men and women, with ranks ranging from Private First Class to Sergeant, prepare for weeks to take their turn at the tomb.

They're assigned to groups by their height. No more than two inches separate those in each duty shifts. Yet, all seem taller, straighter, and a bit prouder.

Part of the reason for the ramrod appearance is from the shoes they wear. Although they're standard military issue boots, the heels and soles are built up.

This is not for protection from the weather, but to aid in the walking, the turning, and the distinctive clicking of the heels.

Strict training ensures that the guard is unflinching and unwavering in duty, no matter the heat of summer, the driving rain of December, or the frozen snow of February.

And most importantly, the guard will remain posted, and the steps will remain perfect, even if there is not another soul in sight and regardless the time.

If you want to join Third United States Infantry Regiment of the US Army, you'll have to learn a new way to walk.

To walk the same way as a visitor to Arlington National Cemetery is to give up the privilege of walking with the Old Guard.

To miss a single step, when it's your turn to guard the tomb, is to miss the opportunity to stand with those who've stood before you. To misunderstand the motivation behind your duty is to miss the point entirely.

For this is the point: Inside the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery are service members who gave their lives for the freedom we enjoy.

You just don't walk the same way when it's your turn to guard the tomb.

Slide 2

We're embarking on a new year, and our minds are drawn to new resolutions, or fresh versions of previous resolutions.

Whether your hope for 2022 includes a better way of balancing your budget or simply finding less of you to balance on your bathroom scales, almost everyone is in a mood to consider change for the New Year.

Therefore, this message from Ephesians is incredibly relevant. Despite the fact the words were written nearly 2,000 years ago, the culture of Ephesus had several similarities with our culture.

For example, they had a tendency to like sinful practices. They were materialistic to a point of overkill. They had sexual practices that left nothing to the imagination, and nothing seemed to shame them.

And yet, in the midst of a very difficult environment, a church sprang up. As Paul ministered to this small group of Christians, it became obvious that people were hungry for something real.

They wanted something more than what their money could buy, more than what their lustful imaginations could create.

And, as they listened and considered the life of Jesus, they changed their ways, and their number began to grow.

In fact, so many people in Ephesus came to Christ and began changing their way of living that the economic core of the city was threatened. You can read about this in Acts 18-19.

The change Paul brought to Ephesus was so dramatic that a riot involving 25,000 or more broke out, with Paul being the focus of the fury.

Eventually, he had to rush out of Ephesus in order to save his life. After this, Paul wrote the church with simple instructions for what he expected of them.

He urged them to do what you're probably hoping to do as a new year dawns. He called them to a new way of living, or as the guards around the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier might say, to a new way of walking.

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Paul was in and out of prison a lot during the last years of his life, in fact, he may have been in prison when he wrote this letter.

Ephesians 4:1, *“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.”*

Even if he wasn't, he was accustomed to life as a prisoner, and when he was imprisoned it was because he preached the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul said, *“I urge you to walk in a way that honors Christ. I'm begging you to do this!”*

But, before we consider how we might live in 2022, we can't miss a foundational point of the Bible's message of how we come to be included in this invitation to walk a certain way.

Ephesians 2:8-10, *“For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift — not from works, so that no one can boast. For we are His creation — created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time so that we should walk in them.”*

The way we live has nothing to do with the way we were saved. Paul was always careful to remind us that we're saved by grace, and by no other means.

We can't avoid enough sins, bake enough pies, make enough hospital visits, read enough Bible, or give enough money to be saved. We just can't.

We can't "walk in a way that honors God" and hope that'll be enough to walk our way into heaven. If we haven't accepted the gift of grace, there'll be no grace at all.

With Christmas just passed, I assume you received a gift of some kind. If you did, it was free. It didn't cost you a dime.

You didn't have to pay taxes on it, and you didn't have to wait in line in an overcrowded store to buy it. You didn't have to pay for shipping, and you didn't even have to wrap it.

Your one and only goal in the transaction was receiving and accepting it. There's nothing more in the transaction process.

We don't need some theological treatise to understand the concept of receiving a Christmas gift. It's easy, it's wonderful, and it's common. But that's the point.

Receiving the gift of salvation, receiving the ultimate Christmas gift is easy, it's wonderful, and it's even common. In fact, millions and millions of people believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior.

But there's as big a step between receiving Christ and living a life that's worthy of that gift as there is in receiving a laptop and actually figuring out how it works.

A person with a computer who takes the time to learn how to use it effectively is a completely different animal than a person with a computer who is just flabbergasted by the thing.

It's like this. The people who got in there and figured out the computer first, made the most money. Some of them are the richest people in America.

The people who first saw the potential of the Internet were the people who made the most money from the Internet.

Even today, the Internet has become a common part of life. People even make money by selling their junk on eBay.

But millions of Americans haven't taken the time to understand how eBay works, so their junk just takes up space, and the potential profit slips away.

Paul discovered, after he was saved by grace, that through his faith in Christ he could better control his thoughts, his lusts, his anxiety, his anger, and his feelings of guilt.

He wasn't a prisoner of things he couldn't do because he had accepted Christ. Knowing Christ gave him a freedom that allowed Paul to *sing* while he was in prison!

So get it clear, right from the start, there's a huge difference between receiving the gift of salvation, and then using that relationship. A huge difference.

Your actions in life have nothing to do with how you're saved. Salvation is by grace alone, grace made available only through the death of Jesus on the cross.

This letter to the Ephesians is a letter to Christians, and this sermon is a message to Christians. Paul says, "I urge you to walk in a way that's worthy of the calling *you have received*."

This is a letter to people who've already received the gift. If you've never received the gift, and you try to plug these principles into play, it just won't work.

You might feel better for a while. You might even see some positive results, like a person who makes and keeps a New Year's resolution, but it won't be the same thing.

Slide 4

The way we walk is also seen in the way we treat other people.

Ephesians 4:1-3, *"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."*

Look at these qualities Paul lists:

Humility

Gentleness

Patience

Bearing with one another

Loving people

Keeping peace

It's pretty simple. When you make an effort to live in a Christ-honoring manner, it immediately affects the people around you.

Why? Because the people around you go first. Other people get the best portion. People you live with, people you work with, people you study with, play with, hang out with; they get more than you do.

They get more honor. They get more prestige. They get more joy. It's a lifestyle that says you'll be the servant, and they'll be the served.

How? Because you make sure it happens that way. When a church is filled with servant leaders, miracles happen. Look at the two preceding verses above this little passage and you'll get this incredible statement:

Ephesians 3:20-21, "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."

The only way this ever happens is through spiritual maturity. A young person, a young adult, can be spiritually mature. While a senior citizen can still be a spiritual child, still be immature when it comes to caring about others more than self.

Patience isn't a quickly or easily learned trait. Bearing with one another sometimes takes all the effort you've got. And only the strongest can pull it off. Only the most committed can get it done.

An admirer once asked Leonard Bernstein what was the hardest instrument to play. He replied without hesitation, "*Second fiddle.*"

He explained, "I can always get plenty of first violinists, but to find one who plays second violin with as much enthusiasm or second French horn or second flute, now that's a problem. And yet if no one plays second, we have no harmony."

The only way our church has the harmony it has, is that most of us are willing to play second fiddle. It's amazing, but if you've ever heard orchestra discord, you know why harmony is worth the effort.

Slide 5

Conclusion

The way you walk, the choice of how you live is completely up to you. The circumstances around you, no matter how good, or how bad can't control how you react to those circumstances.

And therein is exactly what we're focusing upon. Those choices are the "way we walk." Is it hard? Is it difficult?

A married couple was celebrating their 60th wedding anniversary. At the party everybody wanted to know how they managed to stay married so long in this day and age.

The husband responded, *"When we were first married, we came to an agreement. I would make all the major decisions, and my wife would make all the minor decisions."*

At which point the wife took up the tale, *"And in 60 years of marriage we've never needed to make a major decision."*

Walking in a way that honors Christ, to walk in a way worthy of our calling may sound like a major decision. But in a sense, this major decision is made with a lifetime of *minor* decisions.

They need to be made, one at the time, like taking one little step at a time, and pretty soon, you're walking in a brand new way, right into a brand new year.