

Walking By Faith

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[0 : 0 0] Well, for a wee while I'd like us to turn back to 2nd Corinthians chapter 5. We're going to look at this chapter and as we do so, we're actually going to look at a tiny little phrase that is tucked away in this chapter, but one that is among the most important statements that the Bible makes.

It's a tiny little phrase that is crucial for understanding the nature of Christianity as a belief system and it's crucial for understanding what living as a Christian actually involves.

So even though it's a tiny phrase, it's a massive statement and it's one that we've all got to think about. So what phrase is it?

Well, it's verse 7. So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight.

Our title is Walking by Faith and we're going to just look at two things that this tiny phrase brings up. It's helping us to understand the Christian faith and it's helping us to understand the Christian walk.

[1 : 1 3] So in many ways, the first of these is quite a broad consideration of Christianity as a belief system. So we'll be thinking quite kind of broad for the first wee while.

Second one is much more, I guess, specific to us. What does it actually mean to follow Jesus? What does it involve? So that's our two titles, Understanding the Christian Faith, Broadly Understanding the Christian's Walk.

In other words, your walk. So let's start with the first one, thinking about the Christian faith more broadly. One of the reasons why I said that verse 7 is so important is because it's crucial for correcting a massive misunderstanding that exists in relation to the Christian faith.

And it's a misunderstanding that we see all around us in the culture that we live in and it's one that you've probably come across yourself. It's maybe even one that you think yourself.

The misunderstanding is the view that when it comes to Christianity, there is a conflict between faith and reason. Many people have thought that you have this kind of battle between faith and reason.

[2 : 2 1] And the result is that all around us there are people who've come to the conclusion that faith in Jesus and rational thinking are incompatible.

So you have to choose one or the other. It's either faith or its reason. And it manifests itself in lots of ways and in fact it manifests itself both in believers and in unbelievers.

So sometimes you'll come across believers and they're faced with challenges about, say, questions in science or philosophy or history. And they may respond to that by saying, well, I don't know, I just believe.

And they're kind of thinking, well, if I've got to choose between faith and reason, I'll just choose faith and I'll just ignore whatever it is you might be saying. So believers can fall into the trap. Unbelievers do as well, but they do the opposite.

They will say things like, well, unless you can prove God exists, unless you can prove that Jesus rose from the dead, unless you can prove that miracles happen, I'm never going to believe.

[3 : 20] Both of these approaches are based on the idea that faith and reason cannot go together. And what I want us to see and what we're being reminded of here and pointed towards here is that the Bible never, ever places faith in opposition to reason.

It never says we walk by faith, not by reason. The Bible never says that. And it's crucial for us all to recognize this because it's telling you that following Jesus does not mean that you have to leave your brain behind.

And I want to emphasize that because so many people think that that's what Christianity involves. People will say things like, you know, science has disproved Christianity, history has undermined the Bible, philosophy has meant that we no longer need God.

And even the tiniest bit of intellectual awareness will tell you that all of that is absolute rubbish. Because the greatest scientific discoveries of the last 1,000 years have all come either from Christians or people who've grown up in a society influenced by Christianity.

The Bible has been subject to 2,000 years of historical scrutiny, yet it still stands strong. In fact, it has more adherence today than it ever has. And every philosophy that's rejected God has offered nothing in his place except irrational emptiness or radical skepticism.

[4 : 52] And the key point is that the Gospel is not asking you to be stupid or blind or ignorant. There is not a conflict or a trade-off between faith and reason.

In fact, the two go hand in hand. Properly understood, Christianity is a belief system that makes sense.

And that is what I want the first half of this sermon to really teach you and to really remind you of, that Christianity as a belief system makes sense.

That means that Christianity is not intellectually embarrassing. In fact, the truth is Christianity is intellectually satisfying. In fact, the truth is even more than that.

Christianity is the only worldview that is intellectually satisfying. Now, there's a lot that we could say about that, and we could spend a lot of time talking about this, and I do wish we had more time.

[5 : 57] What I want us to do is just spend a few minutes thinking about an example, because what we want to do is try and prove that and say, well, okay, let's try and demonstrate that Christianity is not opposed to reason.

It's not irrational. In fact, we're trying to argue the opposite. Trying to say that it is the worldview that gives you an explanation of reality, an explanation of ultimate reality that makes sense every day.

And that's what we need. We need an explanation for ultimate reality. Whatever ultimate reality is, whatever that ultimate reality is, it needs to make sense to us, and it needs to make sense for us in terms of how we live our lives every day.

In order for that to happen, there needs to be consistency between what you believe every day and your underlying philosophy for life. Now, everybody is a philosopher.

Don't think, oh, philosophy, that's just for weird guys in Athens. Everyone's a philosopher, because it just means you've got a worldview. You have an understanding of the world around you. You have a foundation for your convictions.

[7 : 04] And for something to be intellectually satisfying, these things have to match. Your foundation has to match what you believe. There has to be consistency between those two things.

So your underlying philosophy and the stuff you actually believe and live by, those things have to be in harmony for something to be intellectually satisfying.

If there's a contradiction, then that's not satisfying. The stuff that you believe to be true day to day and the foundation on which those beliefs stand has to be consistent.

And I think that that's a reasonable expectation. I don't think it's outrageous to say that those things should match up. And what I want to argue is that the gospel of Jesus Christ, the belief system that's revealed to us by God and scripture is the only philosophy that's going to give you beliefs that you can actually live with day to day.

And that means that if someone rejects the Christian gospel, it means you either have to betray your underlying philosophy in terms of the way you live your life, or you have to actually believe things that no one can live with.

[8 : 19] And to prove this, I want to take an example that's in the news a lot at the moment. I want to take the example of racism. So we're going to start with David Hume. Some of you may have heard of David Hume.

You may have seen the statue of David Hume that's on the royal mile in Edinburgh. You've probably heard his name in the news at some point over the past year or two. He was a very famous Scottish philosopher.

He lived about 300 odd years ago. And since his lifetime, he's become a champion of atheism because he was very influential in arguing against the idea that you could prove a necessary link between a cause and an effect.

And now at that time, many of the arguments for the existence of God were based on this idea, well, you know, if an effect has a cause, then that cause must have a cause, and that cause must have a cause.

And you can work it all the way back to an ultimate cause, which must be God. That was one of the main arguments to prove the existence of God, a chain of causality all the way back to a first cause.

[9 : 23] Hume undermined that because he said, you cannot prove that a cause and an effect are connected.

He was a radical skeptic and he said, you can't prove a connection. So if I tap this lectern, it makes a noise. I do it again, a noise, and again, a noise, and again, a noise, and again, a noise.

If I do it a million times, it will make a million noises. Can I be sure that the million and one time it will make a noise? David Hume says, no, you can't be sure.

And you're like, I suppose you're probably right. And that was his skepticism that he was saying, you know, you just can't be sure of that. You can't argue connections in those terms.

So he was very, very influential in undermining any notion that you could be certain of anything. He was a radical skeptic, basically. You can't be certain of anything, including the existence of God.

[10 : 31] That's one of the things he was famous for. The other thing that he was famous for is that he was a racist. And there's been lots of controversy because he wrote to say that non-white races were inferior to whites.

So here we have a specific belief and an underlying philosophy. We could almost say the thing he believed, his faith. You could put there and then this underlying philosophy, the reason on which that's based.

So we're going to have these two categories. For David Hume, specific belief is that racism is OK. His underlying philosophy is that you can't prove anything. And what we see there is actual consistency.

That is actually consistent. You say, look, you can't. You can't prove that there's inherent worth in every human. And so you can see that there's a consistent connection between a specific belief and his world view.

In other words, the cause of his philosophy undermined any inherent worth in humanity at meant his racismism was intellectually permissible according to his world view.

[11 : 45] Now, today, thankfully, not many people follow Hume in his racism, but loads of people follow his philosophy. And so you've got lots of people today who would follow him in his kind of skepticism.

Well, you can't prove anything. You can't argue for ultimate truth or anything like that. So our next example is your typical Jen Zeder, somebody born between what is it, 1996 and 2010, something like that.

Very, very, very, very much opposed to racism. And that is wonderful. That's exactly what we want. But at the same time, they hold a philosophy that's saying, well, you can't actually prove anything.

There's an aversion to ultimate truth, to meta narratives and all that kind of postmodern stuff. So you've got this underlying philosophy that follows David Hume and saying, well, you can't actually prove anything.

You can't argue that anything's ultimately right or wrong, but actually racism is totally wrong. And the specific belief of being anti-racist is a good thing, but it's not consistent with their underlying philosophy.

[12 : 55] It's actually a betrayal of that underlying philosophy. I hope that makes sense. I hope you're sticking with me on this one. Okay. Now, you might be sitting there saying, okay, Thomas, that's fine, but there's been loads of Christians who are racist.

That's true. And that's awful. There have been many times when people have claimed to be Christian, and yet they've displayed awful racism.

There's also been times in history when whole societies were racist, and that included many people who were genuine believers. The key point though is that the underlying philosophy of the Christian is that all humanity finds its origin in God, and central to God's creation of humanity is the fact that all humanity is made in God's image.

All humanity is equal. And that means that the Christian who's racist is also betraying their philosophy. In fact, they're committing a horrendous sin.

They're not being true to what their beliefs, their beliefs, the claims of their belief system. To say, you know, racism is okay, but, oh yeah, but I do believe the Bible that says everyone's made in God's image.

[14 : 13] That does not make sense. It does not fit together. It is an intellectual betrayal of your philosophical foundations. Last of all, you have the Christian who is opposed to racism as we all should be.

And the reason that they know that racism is wrong is because their foundational philosophy is based on scripture that emphatically states that all humanity is equal. Every single person is made in the image of God.

Racism is never anything other than totally and utterly wrong. And that position is intellectually consistent.

The foundational philosophy, the reason and the thing you believe, the faith, they fit together. And the point I'm trying to make here is that this argument that faith and reason cannot go together in relation to Christianity is just simply untrue.

It doesn't stand up to scrutiny. Christianity is the only worldview that gives you a view of ultimate reality that makes sense. It's the only worldview that gives you an intellectual basis for life that corresponds to what we can actually live with.

[15 : 25] We cannot go through life. We cannot go through life except in the idea that there's an inherent superiority in one race and another. We can't live with that. And Christianity tells you why.

It tells you that it's because we are all made in God's image. Racism is just one example. There are many, many more. You can look at lots of different examples and what you will find for everybody who rejects Christianity, you will find two things.

You will find normal people who live in contradiction of their philosophical assumptions, or you'll find philosophers who believe awful things.

That's the two things you'll find. People who either live in contradiction or you will find philosophers who believe awful things. So three examples.

Friedrich Nietzsche, very famous philosopher, completely anti the idea of God, famous for saying God is dead.

[16 : 26] He used his nihilistic philosophy to reject the existence of God. And so he thought, well, I need to find another basis for reality. And the conclusion he came to is that the real meaning of life lies in power.

And the key to finding meaning in life is to exercise power, to exercise the will to power, to be the man of power. In fact, he criticized, one of his big criticisms of Christianity was that it helped weak people.

Because really life is all about power. Richard Dawkins has used his naturalistic philosophy to write that there is ultimately no such thing as right and wrong.

That there is ultimately no such thing as right or wrong. He wrote that and it fits his philosophy. Peter Singer, you may have heard of, don't worry if you haven't.

He's a fascinating philosopher. He's Australian, but he's a professor at Princeton University in America. He has got a really, well, I say fascinating, it's actually really weird philosophy that kind of wants to dismiss or minimize any idea that humans are superior to animals.

[17 : 45] And he calls that speciesism, a bit like racism, but speciesism. And he's very much does not want to put humans at another level to animals.

And he's got a very kind of unusual idea of what it means to be a person. That personhood means having awareness, having been able to understand things, being able to plan things, being able to be aware of what good experiences are.

So he's got this weird philosophy about humans, animals, personhood and all that kind of stuff. And he used that philosophy to say, and this is what he's famous for, and I'm quoting him, and I went onto his website to double check that I got this quote right.

This is his quote, killing a defective infant is not moderately equivalent to killing a person.

Sometimes it is not wrong at all. Now, that phrase defective infant translated into normal English is a baby born disabled.

[18 : 52] And he says, sometimes killing it is not wrong at all. These are all examples of philosophers who have rejected Christianity. They've taken a new foundation for their philosophy.

They've followed it consistently through to a set of beliefs like the ones that I've just summarized. Christianity turns to all of these philosophers and says, get lost.

We are not going down that road. And so do most other people. Most other people say, I am not believing that life is all about power.

I'm not believing that there's ultimately no right or wrong. And I'm not believing that it's okay to kill babies who have been born with disabilities. They say that even though they follow Nietzsche and saying life's got no ultimate meaning.

They follow Dawkins and say that ultimately the universe is a machine. And they follow Singer and say that animals have the same rights as humans. It's actually no different.

[19 : 58] And the way that they do all that is by divorcing what they actually believe from their intellectual foundations. In other words, they are the ones who separate faith and reason.

Christianity says you don't have to do that. Christianity is telling you that the ultimate of reality is the God of the Bible.

He is the God of truth, of order, of beauty, of goodness, of consistency, and most of all of love.

And that's the foundation that gives us science and mathematics and music and culture and order and coherence and appreciation of beauty and all of these things that we value.

And ultimately it tells us why we all know that love is the thing that matters most because Christianity is the great revelation of the God who in his extraordinary love towards you and me has given his son to be our savior.

[21 : 07] So Christianity does not draw a contrast between faith and reason and please don't ever fall into the trap of thinking that to be a Christian you have to leave your brain behind.

Christianity does however draw a contrast. It's not a contrast between faith and reason. It's a contrast between faith and sight.

That's the great contrast that the Bible sets before us. And this again is so important to recognize because so often we think that we want to go through life walking by sight.

In other words we want to be able to see where we're going, we want to be able to see everything ahead of us, we want to be able to understand everything that's going on. We don't want to have to face anything where we say well I can't see what's going on.

I can't see where I'm going. I don't understand everything. We don't want to have to go through life facing those kind of questions. Instead we want everything to be within our view, within our perspective, we want it to be clear.

[22 : 13] Christianity says that's not how it works. And so Christianity is not saying that if you believe in Jesus you're going to be able to see and understand everything that goes on in the world around you, in the cosmos or in your own heart.

And that's why Christianity will always involve things that are mysterious. It's not going to give us an explanation for everything that are going to be times when our answer will be.

I don't know. Christianity is not about walking by sight. And for some people that's off-putting. I sometimes think well that's why I don't want to be a Christian because I don't want to have to, I don't want that kind of mystery in my life.

Because when you think about walking by sight it can feel very appealing. If we're going through life we want to see where we're going. We want to see what's happening. We want to have a clear view of things and we kind of want to think that actually we're the person who's got life's lust more than anybody else.

Walking by sight sounds good. It sounds safe. It sounds empirical. It sounds verifiable. It sounds controllable. It's so easy to think I want to walk by sight.

[23 : 25] But you need to think very carefully about that. Because if you want to walk by sight what is that going to prevent in your life? In other words what is walking by sight going to stop you from doing?

It'll stop you from exploring. Because no explorer can see everything between them and the destination that they're hoping they might possibly find.

It'll stop you from being creative. You can't sit down to write a piece of music or paint a painting or make a play or write a book and be certain that it's going to turn out brilliant.

It might turn out rubbish. And for every masterpiece there's been hundreds of mistakes. Because you can't be creative and know that everything's going to turn out perfectly.

It'll stop you from hoping. Because hope that is seen is not hope. And worst of all insisting that you are going to walk by sight will stop you from loving.

[24 : 35] If you love someone, if you commit to loving someone can you be certain that everything is going to work out according to what you can see?

No. No one can be certain of that. Exploration, creativity, hope and love. You can't do any of them if you walk by sight. You can only do them if you walk by faith.

And that's the walk that Christianity is calling us to. And that takes us to our second point. The Christian's Walk.

This verse is telling us that the Christian walk, the life of discipleship is a walk of faith. Paul uses that expression in the context of the sufferings that he's experiencing just now and that the Corinthians are experiencing in comparison to the future that God has for them.

And that's the verses we read at the start. We do not lose heart, though our outward selves wasting away, the inner selves being renewed day by day. This light moment of the affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen.

[25 : 47] For the things that are seen are transient, the things that are unseen are eternal. For Paul and the Corinthians suffering was a reality.

But what Paul is trying to emphasize to them is that the afflictions that they suffer now are part of a journey that's towards something far better. And that future has a weight of glory, as he says here, a splendor, a beauty that's beyond comparison to the sufferings that we might encounter now.

In other words, Paul is saying that on the Christian Walk, the rubbish things that you experience now because of your faith will be worth it.

And as he does this, Paul explains a little bit more about the difference between faith and sight. He says that sight involves looking at the realities that we can see here and now, all of which is transient.

Faith involves looking towards the realities that are unseen, the things that are beyond the here and now, the things that are eternal. And even recognizing that difference is so crucial, recognizing the fact that there are seen realities and unseen realities is a crucial thing for us to think about in order to have an intellectually coherent worldview.

[27 : 08] The point that Paul's highlighting in all of it is the fact that if you are a Christian or if you become one, the thing that he's really driving home is that if you are a Christian or if you become a Christian, your home is not here.

In fact, as he explains in verse one, your ultimate home is when you'll be taken to be with the Lord and join him in his new creation.

And that means that every Christian is on a journey home. We are pilgrims, or as Paul says here, we're walking.

Now this has lots of important implications for us in terms of how we understand what we need to do as we seek to live our lives. So putting aside all the chat about philosophy, what do you need to do this week is what Paul is getting us to think about here.

Let's tie and piece it together. He's saying if you're a Christian or if you become one, you have a home and that home is with God. It's in the future. And I want you to think about that. It's your true home.

[28 : 11] It's the place where you will belong more than anywhere else. It's the place where you will be most at home, where you will get the warmest welcome. It's the place where every other believer who's gone before us is waiting for you and you're on a journey towards that home.

There's a home in the future that God has for us. We are on a journey towards that home. That journey will involve mountains and valleys. It'll involve sunshine and storms. But every day you're getting closer.

And so even though we're on that journey, even though we can't see the destination with our eyes, because our eyes can only see things that are transient, our home is not transient.

Our home is eternal. And so we're heading towards it not by sight, but by faith. So you've got our home. You're on a journey towards that home.

That's the destination we're aiming for. That's the path we're on. And that whole idea of home and journey and destination language means that there's absolutely one crucial thing that every single one of us has got to recognize.

[29 : 23] If there's a home, if there's a journey, if there's a path, the thing you've absolutely got to recognize is that you can't stand still.

Whoever you are, whatever stage you're at in the Christian journey, whether you've not even started or whether you've been following Jesus for decades, there's one thing you cannot do.

You cannot stand still. And that means that the question every single one of us has to ask today, every single one of us has got to ask today is, what's the next step?

You can't stand still. You've got to keep walking. That means you've got to take a next step.

What is it? What is the next step you have to take? Maybe for you, the next step is actually the very first step, the step that says, Lord Jesus, I want to follow you.

[30 : 34] I've got so much I don't know, and I don't feel ready, but I want to follow you. That's the first step. If you've never taken it before, that's your next step.

Maybe your next step is to step back onto the path of discipleship that you might have wondered from. You can all wonder at different times and to different extents.

Your next step is the step back. I remember you've probably heard this said many, many times before, but I think it's so wonderful that no matter how many steps you take away from Jesus, it's always only ever one step back.

It's only ever one step back to follow Him again. Maybe your next step is to pray for the first time in a long time. Maybe it's to start reading the Bible more than just during the church service on Sunday.

Maybe your next step is to tell other people that you're on the path. Maybe you are a believer, but nobody else knows and you're scared to say, maybe your next step is to say, I actually am a believer.

[31 : 34] Maybe your next step is to leave behind a sin for good. Maybe there's a sin that has been just tormenting you and getting you into all sorts of bother. Maybe the next step is just to say, I'm leaving that behind for good.

Maybe your next step is to become more involved in the life of the church. Maybe your next step is to get alongside someone to help them in their walk and to be a support to them, to share your experience with them.

Maybe your next step is to step into a leadership role. Maybe your next step is to sit at the Lord's table tonight for the first time. Everyone has got a next step that they need to take.

But the key thing is that that step has got to be taken by faith, not by sight. So you think to yourself, you know, right, my next step is I haven't prayed in years.

Okay, I've got to pray. I want to start praying today. If you're going to take that step by sight, you need to think to yourself, okay, right, am I ready? Am I? Do I understand prayer?

[32 : 35] Do I know what I should do? Do I? Can I pray properly? Can I pray long enough? Do I have the language? Can I be able to do it right? Will it all work out? Will the prayers be answered? What will happen? You won't do it.

Same with Bible reading. Oh, I'll need to try and figure it out. I don't understand the Bible. I don't. You're trying to go by sight. You're not going to do it. If you think, oh, I want to go to, I want to come to the prayer meeting and I want to go to the Lord's table, but what will happen? What will everyone say? What will I think? What will this?

What will that? What will that? If you try to go by sight, you will not do it. But Jesus isn't calling you. He's calling you. He's calling you. He's calling you. If you go by sight, you will not do it, but Jesus isn't calling you to go by sight.

He's saying just go by faith. And going by faith means you don't actually know how it will work out, but it doesn't matter because Jesus will help you because you're trusting Him.

You have to take that step by faith. And the key thing in it all is that the steps we take have to be shaped by the destination that we're heading towards.

[33 : 41] And that's what Paul is setting before us here, that ultimate reality is not now. And our full understanding of ultimate reality is not going to come now. It's going to come in the future.

And he sets that before us incredibly powerfully in verses 9 and 10. He says, whether we're at home or away, we make it out in to please Him, for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each one may receive what is due for what is done in the body, whether good or evil.

What will happen on that day, the day when we all appear before Jesus, has got to shape what we do this day and in the week ahead.

And in these verses here, we see one of the biggest dangers that we can all fall into. We are all in danger of living our lives with the aim of pleasing the wrong thing.

Time to please, I don't know, a boss or a partner or a spouse or a group of friends or a set of expectations or an inner ambition or an inner resentment or an inner fear.

[34 : 48] Your steps are going to be influenced by whoever it is you're aiming to please. Your steps will be influenced by whoever it is you are aiming to please and in the name of God, that is something that you've got to make sure you don't get wrong.

The Christians walk is one where we are walking by faith. The walking part of that, the walking part tells you that you can't stand still.

There's a next step that you've got to take. The faith part, I'm putting all sorts of scribbles on here, the faith part tells you that you can't wait until you see everything clearly.

You've just got to go for it. There's a whole pile of things I wanted to say on the rest of my notes, but I've run out of time.

I want you to think about this. Forget the whole nonsense that faith is opposed to reason, that's just rubbish. But think about this truth that Paul is setting before us.

[36 : 07] It's not about being able to see everything, being able to understand everything, being able to get your head around everything. That's a ridiculous expectation for a finite creature in comparison to the infinite God.

We're never going to get our heads around everything. We're not going to be able to line everything up to where we want it to be. That's just not how it works. But there's a destination that God's calling you to.

It's absolutely amazing. There's room for you there. There's people, there's brothers, precious brothers and sisters waiting for you there, longing for you to be there.

We've all got a next step that we have to take. Just do it. Amen.