
The Transforming Power of Walking in the Light

Ephesians 5:1-21

Russ Kennedy

This sermon was continued from last week. As we pickup into this chapter, we follow Paul in his thinking by noting two key phrases which structured his writing.

Conclusion: Walking in Love... (v.1-2)

¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

This is the conclusion to chapter 4. In our relationships we are to walk, to live in love. And it opens the discussion in the next section.

Transition: Walking in Light (v.8b)

At one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light

This is the key for chapter 5. In our relationships, we are to walk in purity. Since sex and intimacy are both a real joy and a real challenge, then our author is going to speak to that for our growth, maturity and ministry.

Living in the Light

(v. 3-14)

We are still talking about relationships. The focus here is on sexual purity. It is not exclusively that, but it dominates the text. And, we are going to come a section that sounds very different to us in our culture than it would have sounded to them in theirs.

Do not Participate

(v. 3-6)

We must guard ourselves from sexual sin in our attitudes and in our actions.

³ But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. ⁴ Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. ⁵ For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

In our Conduct

(v. 3)

We must not be immoral, impure and coveting others in a sexual way. We must guard against sexual sins so that it never has to be spoken about. This is a high standard. In his concern for relationships that please God, Paul points us to sexual purity. And I think he has in mind a particular kind of coveting, of wanting what is not yours to be yours. The connection between immorality and coveting reflects how

the Old Testament often spoke of adultery in connection with coveting someone else's wife.

With our Speech

(v. 4)

We must not be vulgar in our speech. As Stott put it, "All three [expressions] refer to a dirty mind expressing itself in dirty speech." (Stott, p. 192). What is to be avoided is filthy talk, obscene and coarse jesting and talk that reflects a low view of intimacy.

What must fill our speech instead is thanksgiving. Expressing gratitude for God, his people, His gifts. Gratitude is a way of both uplifting the subject and the hearer. And the sense is that rather joking with sex, we ought rather to give thanks for it. What is in view is purity without being puritanical. A Biblical wise and healthy view of physical intimacy in marriage then will not degrade it but rather will elevate it.

Because of Judgment

(v. 5-6)

Two truths are intertwined here. Paul has talked about them before but not inter-connected like this.

This is not who we are. He has said "this is not fitting for saints." It is not like them. This is a way of looking back to what we have become. Now he looks forward to what we will receive, our inheritance. We should not behave like sinners. Rather, we should behave like saints who are sons with an inheritance because that is who we are.

This is what will happen to sinners, to those who are not saints. Those who keep on practicing sin do so because they are sinners and not saints. They are the sons of disobedience. This stands as a warning intended to motivate saints to live like saints. If you live like a sinner, then that is what you are and you will get what all sinners will get, judgment.

Once again, we are not talking about losing your salvation. We are talking about living out who you are and warning you not to live like a sinner lest you prove that are no saint. There is not middle ground. Sinners practice sin with ever more impunity. Saints may fall into sin, but they are not sinners. If you are a sinner, then you will suffer the wrath of God. If you are saint and a child of God, then you will receive your inheritance, the fulfillment of all God's promises.

Do not Partner**(v. 7-10)**

We must be very careful of our fellowship with unbelievers.

⁷ Therefore do not become partners with them; ⁸ for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), ¹⁰ and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

He is sternly shaking his finger at us warning us that some people may try to dissuade us from believing these truths.

By a Clear Command**(v. 7)**

What actually are we being warned against? What does this word “partner” mean? Does it mean that we cannot enter into contracts with unbelievers? Does this mean that we should not enter into agreements with immoral unbelievers? We have to know what the word means in this sentence in order to obey the command.

The root of the word means, “to have in common, to share, to have a joint venture.” It is translated both “fellowship” and “partnership” in the Bible. The underlying meaning is in view here with the idea of enjoying a close relationship that is like the fellowship between Christians.

The sentence does not stand on its own. It is a conclusion from the paragraph before. Since the immoral, impious and covetous are not going to receive the blessings from God and will receive the wrath of God, then do not have a Christian kind of relationship with them. Simply this. There is a kind of friendship we can have with unbelievers that expresses God’s love and builds a relational bridge for the gospel. But your close friends should all be believers. Those who you are spending time with, developing relationships with, seeking to receive and give counsel should not be unbelievers, particularly those who are steeped in immorality and impurity. Yes, Jesus had dinner with all kinds of sinners including prostitutes. But His friends were those who believed in Him.

Now, I know this is controversial. I know it is not popular. Some of you actually have more close friends who are unbelievers than believers. I only ask that you consider the possibility that this text is calling you to be careful about your friendships with the lost and cultivate deep friendships with the saints.

Because of our Identity**(v. 8-9)**

Using the analogy of light and darkness, Paul does what he has done before. He contrasts what we used to be with what we are now. He doesn’t say, “We ought to be light.” He says, “We are light”. Since we are light, then we ought to live like children of the light. Live like who or what you are.

With a Transforming Goal**(v. 10)**

As children of the light, we are to work hard at discerning what is pleasing to God. So we believe and teach that who God says you are is essential to daily Christian living. And you must work hard at building a God-pleasing way of life.

Are you pleasing to God? Does your moment by moment conversation and conduct reflect that you are living in love and light? Do you seek to gain insight into what does please God? Do you think about what you read, what you see, where you go, who are your closest friends? You are to discern this for yourselves. This may sound shocking, but pleasing God will be different for different Christians. Not listening to jazz may be pleasing to God one and listening to jazz may be pleasing to God for another. We are not talking about the moral commands of the Bible. We are talking about working out dialing living inside the fence in the field of freedom. There, we are pleasing to God as we think carefully about our life before Him.

Do Expose them **(v. 11-14)**

We must not merely avoid sinful deeds; we must also be willing to expose them.

¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. ¹³ But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, ¹⁴ for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

By a Strong Imperative **(v. 11)**

The command has two actions: don't get involved but expose instead. Here is an unusual "not that, but this". Paul is warning us not to get involved in the sins done in secret. They are not only works of darkness but done in darkness. This seems to have the pagan rites that took place in secret, in the night, with groups in memberships often involved in things ranging from horrible sexual acts to subversion of the government. It is texts like this that prohibit a Christian from being involved in secret societies (Masons) and pagan associations. And we are called to expose these unfruitful works of darkness, bringing them out of the dark places in which they lurk and into the light where they can be seen for what they are.

With Biblical Reasons **(v. 12-14)**

Notice the reason given - those things are shameful. How do we know they are shameful? They are done in secret, in the dark. But we are not to even discuss those things. It seems to me that the social media is where we need to be most careful here. Social media is sinful at all, but it can be a means to let our discernment and our guard down so that we tweet and message and Facebook/Google+ things that we simply shouldn't be talking about.

The Scriptural reason may come from three possible Old Testament texts. Given the context and the purpose, it is a synthesis based on Isaiah 60:1-3 and Malachi 4:2

¹ Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. ² For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. ³ And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.

But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. (Malachi 4:2)

So the rising light of the Lord Jesus Christ brings into light the deeds of darkness and causes His people to live with joy in righteousness. Because of putting on our beautiful garments of righteousness and the glorious city of Zion, we are to live in the freedom of who we are in Christ.

Living in Godly Wisdom

(v. 15-21)

This section closes with three important commands connected to living in godly wisdom. There is a sense that we are commanded to live wisely in our relationships.

¹⁵ Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Managing your time

(v. 15-16)

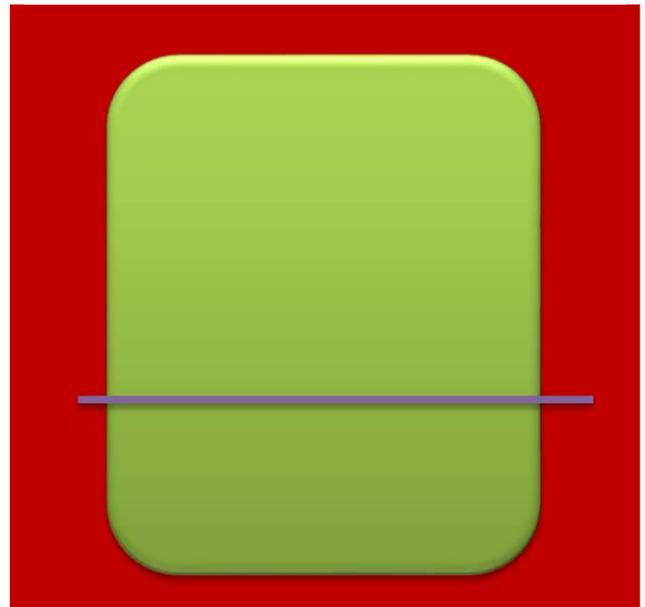
We are to order our lives wisely so as to make good use of the time God has given us. In the midst of evil days, Christians are to keep our focus in pleasing God and not letting the world eat up more and more of our time. In our own busy, busy days, some of you need to think about this. How much chasing around are you doing that is keeping you from ministry, serving or even just from church and family?

Understanding God's Will

(v. 17)

So, all of the commands constitute God's will. We can understand what God's will is, what His moral directives to us are by wisely living the truth and obeying His commands. God's redeeming plan gives rise to God's transforming will.

So there is a large field of wisdom. Everything outside the fence is what God has forbidden. These are His "do not..." commands. Everything inside the fence is what God requires and what He allows. Below the line are His positive commands, His "You must do..." Above the line is freedom in wisdom in all God allows and we do what seems best. Paul brings us back to this in the midst of this long ethical section. We are reminded that we to be pleasing to God by carefully obeying His commands and living in the freedom of wisdom He has granted.



Experiencing true Worship

(v. 18-20)

¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, ²⁰ giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

I am putting this all under one heading because of the connection between Paul's command and the expression of that command. There is a negative and positive aspect of this command. Do get drunk with wine; instead be filled with the Spirit. The sense here is that of being under the control – don't be controlled and therefore depressed by alcohol. Do be controlled and thus enlivened by the Spirit. This is consistent with the Bible as a whole. The Bible does not forbid alcoholic drinks; it forbids being drunk. For some, it is unwise to drink at all. But the point here is that we ought to be filled with the Spirit so that we are under His control.

But then notice that being filled with the Spirit produces real, relational joy. Being under the Spirit's control will cause singing to one another, giving thanks to God and submitting to one another. The Spirit will fill our hearts with words, songs, gratitude and a desire to serve and submit to one another.

What we are experiencing then is authentic worship. Faith, obedience, the filling of the Spirit that brings our lives under the Lord's control and enables real joy in our relationships.

Reflect and Respond

From last week:

We have been much misrepresented and slandered by a former member. This text refutes almost all of the errors he attributes to us. We teach that the we are saved and the we live our Christian lives by the truths of gospel. The death, burial and resurrection are essential to understanding the Christian life. What the death and resurrection have done for us is our position and our identity as Christians. This radical change is part of our transformation. We have been saved and sanctified and now are becoming holy through faith and obedience. We teach that we are to obey God and to live wisely in His ways. This text is full of commands that are to be obeyed. We obey them because God is empowering us to obey them and we set our hearts to obey them.

We will continue to teach you the truth so that you hear Christ and learn of Christ and walk in those truths. This will look like loving relationships with each other and faithful obedience to God.

Let's not lose the second focus of this text. This is how Christians walk in love and live the truth. It is not abstract theology or Christian theory. It is hard, grinding, tough, loving obedience to God in the midst of a pagan world (and sometimes pagan church) that laughs, mocks, slanders and hates it.

May God grant us grace:

To hear what we are being taught;

To live what we are being taught;

To understand who we are as God's people;

To understand how the death and resurrection of Jesus apply to us;

To love one another sacrificially;

To think, speak and behave in obedience to God;

May the love and kindness of Jesus so fill our hearts that we will be a kind, loving and forgiving people even when others sin against us.

Love and light - may God help us to carefully work out a lifestyle that reflects who we are and what He has done for us.