

Ephesians 5:8-10

Introduction

Last week, Paul turned from his summing up of the Christian life as *self-sacrificing love* to the total opposite way of living – self-indulgent sensuality.

“Therefore be imitators of God as beloved children, and walk in love, just as also Christ loved us and gave up Himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God, for a fragrant aroma.”

“**But** sexual immorality and all impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as befits holy ones; nor *filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking*, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you must know with certainty, that everyone who is *sexually immoral or impure or greedy* (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes on the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become fellow partakers with them.”

So we see that sexual immorality and impurity are never the result of a “natural drive,” but rather the result of greed, which is idolatry – the insatiable desire for selfish gratification. Our idolatry results in a powerful greed—even a craving—and it’s this greed and craving which then results in sexual immorality and impurity – the seizing of the gift at will from the creation, rather than thankfully acknowledging all things as gifts *sovereignly* bestowed by our **good and loving Creator**. We saw that in a sense, sexual immorality sums up our entire way of life apart from Christ (even if this isn’t a sin we struggle with) because it’s one of the ultimate expressions of living for self. It’s the living of life with self at the center, and so the breaking of God’s command to *love Him* with all of our heart, soul, strength, and mind.

We also saw last week just how far away we are to stay from sexual immorality, all impurity, and greed. They aren’t even to be named among us. There must be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking – whether spoken or listened to. The idea here is “innuendo,” “insinuations,” and “suggestive language,” – the treating of sexual matters lightly or as “a topic of amusement.” (Lincoln) All of these things are to be naturally and utterly and wholly repugnant to God’s chosen holy ones, who are characterized by thanksgiving. For indeed, it is on account of these very things that the wrath of God is coming on the sons of disobedience. Therefore, we must not become partakers with them.

Now, in the next seven verses, Paul continues to address the *same theme* of sexual immorality, but from the “positive” perspective. This morning we’ll be looking at just the next *three* verses. “For you were once *darkness*, but now — *light* in the Lord. Walk as children of *light* (for the fruit of the *light* is in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.”

I. “For you were once darkness, but now — light in the Lord.”

“You were once... but now...” Paul never tires of remembering and celebrating the contrast between what we once were, and what we are now. We were once dead in our trespasses and sins, but now God has made us alive together with Christ (2:1, 4-5). We were once separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world, but now in Christ Jesus we who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (2:12-13) We were once darkness, but now — light in the Lord. We are in *so many* different and wonderful ways “new creations” in Christ. (Eph. 2:10) And that is, to say the least, an *encouraging* thought when we take hold of it by *faith*.

Over the next seven verses, we have the continuous theme of light and darkness. In chapter four, Paul spoke of the Gentiles as those who are “*darkened* in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart, who, having become callous have given themselves over to unrestrained degeneracy for the working of every impurity in greediness.” (4:18-19) See how here also, darkness is associated with sexual immorality. Now when we think of darkness, we shouldn’t think of the darkness that comes from turning the lights out or the sun going down at night, but rather the darkness that comes from *shutting* our eyes or being *blind*. It’s like what Jesus said:

- ✓ Luke 11:34 — Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light, but when it is bad, your body is full of darkness.

So in other words, the real problem is never any lack of light around us, but a lack of ability or willingness to see the light. This explains how Paul can say *not just* that we were once *walking in* the darkness, but even that we were once darkness itself (cf. Ellicott; quoted in Braune). We were the ones unwilling to open our eyes because of the hardness of our hearts. And yet we couldn’t change our hearts to make ourselves willing. So our darkness was our lack of the true *knowledge* of God (cf. Hendriksen). Our darkness was our alienation from the life of God. It was our inability to *comprehend*—to *approve* and to *love*—all of *His ways* and *His character* and *His laws*. That’s the darkness Paul is talking about. And so it was this darkened understanding that inevitably *resulted* in self-indulgent greed and idolatry (of which one of the ultimate expressions in every age is sexual immorality). It was our darkened understanding and our blindness to the true knowledge of God that explained our self-indulgent sensuality.

But now here’s the beautiful thing – “For you **WERE ONCE** darkness...” – “that is, *thanks to God*, [the darkness] is **PAST!**” (Braune) “For you *were once* darkness, *but now* — light in the Lord.” You can almost hear Paul’s joy in the abruptness of his words: “but now—*light(!)* in the Lord.” The point is, “But now *you are* light in the Lord.” We’re not just walking in the light, we *are* light. If the *eye* is good, Jesus said, then the *whole body* will be full of light (Luke 11:34). And so Paul says in another place that God has taken away the blindness of our minds so that we might see “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God.” (2 Cor. 4:4) *He* has shone in our lives to *give us* “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (2 Cor. 4:6; cf. 1 Jn. 1:5) This is the miracle of saving grace!

Among a certain sect of Jewish people around the time of Jesus, it was a rigorous, legalistic obedience to God's rules that defined the children of light. But for Paul, it's just the simple reality of our union with Christ that has made us children of light. (cf. Lincoln) "But now [you are] light," he says, "*in the Lord*." No longer are we alienated from the life of God, or lacking in the true knowledge of God. Now that our eyes have been opened, we are (all of us!) full of light. Now we are able to *understand and comprehend*—to *approve* and to *love*—all of *God's ways* and *His character* and *His laws*. And this, in turn, means that we no longer have to walk in self-indulgent greed and idolatry. We no longer have to be slaves to sexual immorality or any kind of sexual impurity. To the complete contrary! "For you were once darkness, but now — *light(!)* in the Lord..."

II. "Walk as children of light—(for the fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth)"

Once again, we feel like we can hear Paul's joy—even exuberance—in the abruptness of his words. "For you were once darkness, but now — *light(!)* in the Lord. *Walk(!)* as children of *light(!)*" There's no connecting "*therefore*" or "*so therefore* walk as children of light." It's just, "*Walk(!)* as children of *light(!)*" One commentator describes this as "energetically added" (Braune) – which is, I think, to say that Paul adds it *happily* and *joyfully*. The theme of our *walk* – of our daily, moment by moment way of thinking and speaking and acting – has been a constant theme in Ephesians.

- ✓ Ephesians 2:1-2 — And you, being dead in your trespasses and sins in which you once *walked*...
- ✓ Ephesians 2:10 — For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should *walk* in them.
- ✓ Ephesians 4:1 — I urge you therefore... to *walk* worthy of the calling with which you were called...
- ✓ Ephesians 4:17 — This therefore I say and testify in the Lord that you no longer *walk* just as the Gentiles also *walk*...
- ✓ Ephesians 5:1-2 — Therefore be imitators of God as beloved children, and *walk* in love...
- ✓ Ephesians 5:1-2 — For you were once darkness, but now — *light(!)* in the Lord. *Walk(!)* as children of *light(!)*.

Brothers and sisters, we no longer have to walk in self-indulgent greed and idolatry. We no longer have to be slaves to sexual immorality or any kind of sexual impurity – no matter what our situation may ever be. We *can* know the freedom and joy of thanksgiving and self-sacrificing love on a daily and consistent basis in our Christian lives. And why is this? Because God has opened our eyes, and now we are *light* in the Lord. We're able now to *understand* and *comprehend* what we couldn't understand and comprehend before – and that's all of *God's ways* and *His character* and *His laws*. We're able now to *approve* and to *love* what we couldn't approve and love before – and that is all *goodness* and *righteousness* and *truth*.

"The *fruit* of the light," and we *are* light, "is in all goodness and righteousness and truth." Not in *sexual immorality* and *impurity* and *greed*. Not in *filthiness* and *foolish talk* and *crude joking*. "The fruit of the light is in *all goodness* and *righteousness* and *truth*." It's like Paul summarized

the entire Christian life in one word (“love”), and now he’s summarizing love in three words (cf. Lincoln). It reminds us of verses like these:

- ✓ 1 Kings 3:6 — Solomon said, “You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father, because he walked before you in *faithfulness*, in *righteousness*, and in *uprightness* of heart toward you.
- ✓ 2 Chronicles 31:20 — Thus Hezekiah did... what was *good* and *right* and *faithful* before the LORD his God.
- ✓ Psalms 15:1–2 — O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill? He who walks *blamelessly* and does what is *right* and speaks *truth* in his heart.
- ✓ Micah 6:8 — He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do *justice*, and to love *kindness*, and to walk *humbly* with your God?

“Walk as children of light—(for the fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth)...” That’s it. Pretty straightforward isn’t it? On the one hand, maybe we know this is what we want to be. But on the other hand, it seems so broad, and so general, and maybe even “vague” (cf. Thielman). *All* goodness, *all* righteousness, *all* truth. Where’s the detailed checklist? Where’s the outline of exactly *what is* good and right and true in every unique situation that you face from day to day? So often that’s what we want. And so we look for it when we’re reading the Bible. But if that’s what we find in the Bible, then we’re reading the Bible the wrong way. We look for that list of what’s good and right and true in other books by Christian authors – but very often, those books are very much the wrong books to be reading. Maybe it’s most common to look to our pastors and teachers to tell us what is good, and right, and true in our own unique situations from day to day. And part of the reason for this is that we always like to be hearing something “new” – what we often like to call “practical.” But this isn’t the role of the pastor/teacher either – and that shocks a lot of people. How are we to know what’s good and right and true in our own unique situations from day to day if we can’t find all the specifics and details in our Bibles, in other books, or even in the teaching of our pastors? How *can* we know? – Well, the wonderful answer is right here in front of us! “For you were once darkness, but now — **[YOU ARE] light** in the Lord.” *You* are able to *understand* and *comprehend* what you couldn’t understand and comprehend before – and that’s all of *God’s ways* and *His character* and *His commands*. Now that *you are light* in the Lord, *you are able to discern for yourself* exactly what is good and right and true in your own unique situation from day to day. **YOU – ARE – LIGHT!** And so that explains why Paul can go on to say this: “Walk as children of light—(for the fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth)...”

III. “carefully working to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.”

“Carefully working to discern” is a translation of only one word in the Greek (*dokimazo*). Jesus uses this word in Luke chapter twelve:

- ✓ Luke 12:56 — You hypocrites! You know how to *interpret* [*analyze*; NASB] the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to *interpret* [*analyze*] the present time?

Maybe today we would say something like this: “You know how to *read* the appearance of earth and sky.” The point is *carefully evaluating* in order to come to some *conclusion* and *course of action*. In one of Jesus’ parables, a man says:

- ✓ Luke 14:19 — I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to *examine* them [*try them out*; NASB].

The point *here* is *testing* the oxen in order to *find out* how they do. So we can translate here in Ephesians chapter five: “*carefully working to discern* what is pleasing to the Lord.” That’s the task of *every*, individual, Spirit-filled Christian. There’s no one else in the world who is meant to do that *for you*. There are no legitimate outlines or books or sermons on what exactly is good and right and true in the unique, real life situations that you face from day to day. Listen to what O’Brien writes:

“The Jew who knew God’s will was to ‘approve’ what was essential on the basis of the law (Rom. 2:18). Christians, however, have ‘*learned Christ*’. They have responded to the gospel and received further instruction *about him* (4:20, 21) from those specially equipped by the ascended Lord Jesus ([pastors and teachers] 4:11; cf. 2:20; 3:5). Thus, their lives are shaped *in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus* (4:21). This Christ-centred instruction, which focuses on the truth of the gospel, is the yardstick by which believers are to discern in specific situations what pleases their Lord.” (cf. Cullmann; quoted in Lincoln)

Since *we* are no longer darkness, but rather *light* in the Lord, we are *able* to test and discern for ourselves exactly what is good and right and true in our own unique situations from day to day. And so Paul also writes in Romans and then Philippians:

- ✓ Romans 12:2 (cf. 15:14) — Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by *testing you may discern* what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.
- ✓ Philippians 1:9–10 (NIV) — And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to [test and] *discern what is best* and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

Conclusion

My brothers and sisters, we were once darkness. We lacked the true knowledge of God. We were alienated from the life of God. We were unable to comprehend—to approve and to love—God’s character and ways. And this darkened understanding inevitably resulted in self-indulgent greed and idolatry (of which one of the ultimate expressions in every generation is sexual immorality).

But now we are light in the Lord. No longer are we alienated from the life of God, or lacking in the true knowledge of God. Now that our eyes have been opened, we are full of light. Now we are able to *understand* and *comprehend*—to *approve* and to *love*—all of *God’s ways* and *His character* and *His laws* as they’ve been most fully revealed to us in Christ. And this, in turn,

means that we no longer have to walk in self-indulgent greed and idolatry. We no longer have to be slaves to sexual immorality or any kind of sexual impurity – no matter what our situation may ever be. **INSTEAD**, we *can know* the freedom and joy of all goodness and righteousness and truth on a *daily, moment by moment, consistent basis* in our Christian lives. We can discern and approve from day to day what is pleasing to our Lord.

How infinitely far away this is from what so many Christians spend so much of their time doing – trying to discern what we can get by with (maybe that’s the TV show I like watching), trying to discern what is not explicitly forbidden, trying to discern the “gray” areas.” Is that what we’re doing? To borrow from the title of Piper’s book, is that how we’re wasting our lives and robbing ourselves of true joy? Hendriksen puts it like this: “Let the *true knowledge of God* [and our participation in the very life of God]... be [our] standard constantly... let the joy of salvation be the very tenor of [our] lives.” Our eyes have been opened, and as Paul will say in verse 14, Christ Himself now *shines* upon us. “The Christian’s whole course is a continual *proving [and] testing* of the will of God in practice: *investigating not what pleases himself, but what pleases Him.*” (Alford; quoted in Braune) Lincoln says: “Believers are *able to discover* the will of God in the concrete situations they face, *as they place their whole beings at God’s disposal.*” (cf. Rom. 12:1-2)

Brothers and sisters, *since you are light in the Lord*, may you gladly and joyfully **walk** from day to day and moment to moment *as* children of light... carefully working to discern *what is pleasing to our Lord* in all things and at all times.