

# THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF WALKING IN THE LIGHT

## EPHESIANS 5:1-21

As we pick this chapter back up in Ephesians, we are continuing to follow Paul's thinking. Now, I need to thank Pastor Russ Kennedy, as I have been greatly helped by his previous works in these verses. But let's get our bearings by noting two key phrases which structured his writing:

The previous section concludes: Walking in Love... (v.1-2)

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

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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. Which leads us to his transition from walking in "love" to:

Walking in Light (v.8b)

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

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This is important 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 in sex-saturated cultures, both in Paul's day and ours, he is going to speak into that for our growth and maturity. More importantly, he's going to lay out the standard pattern for the life of a saint. Here's what Paul has to say...

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*<sup>5</sup> Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. <sup>2</sup> And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

*<sup>3</sup> But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. <sup>4</sup> Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. <sup>7</sup> Therefore do not become partners with them; <sup>8</sup> for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light <sup>9</sup> (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), <sup>10</sup> and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. <sup>11</sup> Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. <sup>12</sup> For it is shameful even to speak of the things*

that they do in secret. <sup>13</sup> But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, <sup>14</sup> for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

“Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

<sup>15</sup> Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, <sup>16</sup> making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup> Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. <sup>18</sup> And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup> addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, <sup>20</sup> giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

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## LIVING IN THE LIGHT (V. 3-14)

As we follow Paul’s lead in verse 3, we are still talking about relationships. He opens with sexual purity. It is not only about that, but it certainly is a main focus here.

### DO NOT PARTICIPATE (V. 3-6)

We must keep ourselves from sexual sin in what we do and how we speak...

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<sup>3</sup> But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. <sup>4</sup> Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

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### IN OUR CONDUCT (V. 3)

We must not be immoral, impure or coveting others in a sexual way. We must guard against sexual sins so that it never even has to be spoken about. The idea of “not being named” is a simple, and one author sums it up well: “The meaning is simply that there should never be a reason for having to speak about [it], since the people should not themselves be guilty of such behavior.”<sup>1</sup> This is a high standard. Paul is concerned that our relationships please God, so he points us to sexual purity. Notice the way Paul has packaged these sins together here: sexual immorality, impurity and covetousness. The connection between immorality and coveting reflects how the Old Testament often spoke of adultery in connection with coveting someone else’s wife. For those of you who struggle with all manner of sexual sin, *take notice*. Beware of a covetous heart that wants what it does not have (or what God has not given), and the devastating (and often, very controlling) sin that it leads to.

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<sup>1</sup> Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains, Louw-Nida

#### *WITH OUR SPEECH (v. 4)*

But it's not just sexual sin that Paul deals with in our relationships. We must also not be shameful, foolish, or vulgar in our speech. As Stott put it, "*All three [expressions] refer to a dirty mind expressing itself in dirty speech.*" (Stott, p. 192). We are to avoid the kind of talk and jokes that show a low, corrupt view of sexual intimacy.

Instead, our speech should be overflowing with thanksgiving (which is the opposite of covetousness). Over the past few weeks, I've been struck with the difference between gratitude and thanksgiving. They are both very closely related and driven by appreciation. Gratitude is an internal state of mind, and something that believers should be filled with by God's blessings. But notice, that's not what's in view here. Paul calls us to "*...let there be thanksgiving.*" Thanksgiving is an outward expression of that gratitude. We should express our gratitude to God and to his people for what he's doing in our lives. This uplifts the receiver and the hearer. And in this passage, the sense is that rather than joking about sex, we ought rather to giving thanks for it in honorable ways. A biblical view of sexual intimacy in marriage will not degrade it, but rather will elevate and be thankful for it.

#### *BECAUSE OF JUDGMENT (v. 5-6)*

In the next two verses, Paul begins connecting the lifestyle of people with their ultimate end. He's echoing his previous statements, but now, with the future in mind. He looks forward to what will be received, both for the sinner (sons of disobedience) and the saint.

For believers, we have an inheritance. A rich and glorious inheritance that he opened his letter with. This means we should not behave like disobedient sinners. Rather, we should behave like saints who have an inheritance...because *that is* who we are.

Notice Paul's warning, not to be deceived. People who keep on practicing sin do so because they are sinners and not saints. They are the sons of disobedience. They will surely receive the full and terrifying wrath of God. It should be a warning that motivates saints *to live like* saints and work hard to purge sin from their lives and live for the glory of God.

Now, I need to make a clarification here. This text may be misunderstood and misused to teach the false doctrine that you can lose your salvation. That's not what Paul is talking about. Paul is talking about living out who we actually are. Salvation does not come as a result of our works (2:8-9), it comes by God's grace. However, Paul is pointing out that our salvation must be lived out. It serves as a warning not to live like a sinner, or else you may be proving that are not a saint at all. There is no middle ground. Sinners seek sin with more and more intensity, spiraling downward into the darkness and despair that it sin delivers. Saints will 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, and be judged by the righteousness of Christ.

#### *DO NOT PARTNER (v. 7-10)*

Paul now leads us from living out our salvation, to our partnerships. We must be very careful how we interact and maintain our relationships with unbelievers.

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

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### *BY A CLEAR COMMAND (V. 7)*

What does this word “partner” mean? Does it mean that we cannot have contracts with unbelievers? Does this mean that we should not make agreements with immoral unbelievers? We have to know what the word means here this sentence and context 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 with the idea of enjoying a close relationship that is similar to the fellowship between Christians.

It’s important, though, to see that the sentence does not stand on its own. It is a conclusion from the paragraph before. Since immoral, covetous and idolatrous people are not going to receive the blessings, but instead the wrath of God, then do not have a Christian-like relationship with them. There is a kind of friendship we can have with unbelievers that expresses God’s love and builds bridges for the gospel. Yes, do that! But your close friends, the ones that shape your life should be believers. Those who you are spending time with, developing deep relationships with, seeking to receive and give counsel should not be unbelievers, particularly those who are steeped in immorality and impurity. Ultimately, Paul is pointing us towards a life that does not join in the kinds of sinful words and actions that unbelievers will be judged for.

Now, I know this may be controversial. It’s certainly not going to help anyone’s popularity. Some of us may actually have more close friends who are unbelievers than believers. But I ask you to consider the possibility that Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is calling you to be careful about your friendships with unbelievers and cultivate deep friendships with fellow saints. Additionally, let’s consider the “friends” we listen to day in and day out in the media we consume.

### *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. Let your actions ‘shine’ in a way that show the truth of who we are as saints.

### *WITH A TRANSFORMING GOAL (V. 10)*

As children of the light, we are to work hard at discerning what is pleasing to God. *Who* God says you are, is essential to living each day as a saint. And you must work hard at building a God-pleasing way of life, based on the knowledge and belief of who you are in Christ.

So, are you living to please God? Do you live each day, reminding yourself that Jesus has saved your soul? Do your thoughts, desires, words and actions reflect ‘saintly’ living in love and light? Do you study the word, and seek discipleship to gain insight on what it says about pleasing God? Do you think about what you read, what you see, where you go, or who your closest friends are? Believers should be carefully considering these kinds

of things. This may sound odd...but keep in mind that pleasing God will look different, for different Christians. This is one of the things that has been deeply grieving to me during this pandemic. Christians, being destructively divided on issues of how to best please the Lord. In many cases, we are talking about making choices that God has allowed us the freedom to choose. We'll talk more about this when we get to verse 17.

### DO EXPOSE THEM (v. 11-14)

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

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

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### AN IMPERATIVE (v. 11)

The command has two actions: don't participate in; and instead expose. Not only is he warning us not to get involved in the sins done in secret; evil, unbiblical, and done in the private places away from prying eyes. 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)

This isn't just a command, it's a command with a clear reason – those things are shameful! How do we know they are shameful? Well, for starters, they are done in secret, in the dark. But Paul goes further and says we are not to even talk about those things. It seems to me that social media and digital communications are where we need to be most careful here. Social media is not at all sinful by itself, but it can be a place where our discernment slips and our guard is let down so that we tweet, Facebook post, snapchat, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitch, Parlor, TikTok, WeChat, WhatsApp, or iMessage things that we as saints simply shouldn't be taking part in, talking about or even insinuate.

The reason is in the following Scriptural quote, which may come from a few possible Old Testament texts. Given where and how Paul has used it, it seems to be based on Isaiah 60:1-3 and Malachi 4:2

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*<sup>1</sup> Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.*

— Isaiah 60:1-3

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*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

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These Old Testament verses are a foreshadow. So, Jesus Christ's rising from the dead shines light on the works of darkness and causes His people to live with joy in righteousness. Because we are dressed in Jesus' righteousness, we are to live in the freedom of who we are in Christ. Righteous saints.

## LIVING IN GODLY WISDOM (v. 15-21)

This section closes with three important commands connected to living in godly wisdom, keeping in mind Paul still has relationships as a main thread through this passage.

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<sup>15</sup> *Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, <sup>16</sup> making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.*

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## MANAGING YOUR TIME (v. 15-16)

We are to work at planning and structuring our lives wisely to make good use of the time God has given us. As Christians, we are to keep our focus on pleasing God and not letting worldly, fleshly desires gobble up more and more of our time. Many of us say we are 'just so busy'. How much these things are worldly pursuits that keep us from ministry, serving or even just from your church family? One productivity leader, enabled by common grace says, "You don't need more time. You just need to decide." So, what do your choices say about your life as a saint?

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<sup>17</sup> *Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.*

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## UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WILL (v. 17)

Paul then continues on, building to our ability to be wise as we walk in the light by knowing what the will of the Lord is. But, what is "the will of the Lord"? Well, it's all of God's commands in Scripture. So, we can understand and know what God's will is for each of us by studying his word, knowing what he commands us to do, and then living this truth and obeying him. Let's unpack, "God's will for me" a bit more.

Author James Petty has a helpful visual for thinking about this<sup>2</sup>. We start with a small center circle of all of the things God has commanded us "not to do". Anything God has forbidden falls inside here and in the grand scheme of things, it's relatively small. Then there's a second, larger circle of things God has commanded us "TO do". We *must* do these things, like "love God" and "love your neighbor"<sup>3</sup>, or many of the commands he is

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<sup>2</sup> *Step by Step: Divine Guidance for Ordinary Christians* by James C Petty

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 22:37-38

preparing us to hear. These are things we must think about “how” to obey them. In many cases, there is freedom and wisdom in doing them. Then there’s everything else. These are things we don’t have specific guidance on like what job to take, what car to drive, what house to buy, or what specific person we should marry. In this final, largest area is freedom in wisdom in all God allows (as long as we first keep in mind the previous two circles). We do what seems best with the aim to please God based on biblical principles taught in his Word. That’s our goal in all of these decisions. Pleasing God.

## EXPERIENCING TRUE WORSHIP (v. 18-21)

So it is no surprise then that Paul begins to expound on this in the following verses.

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

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These verses are not disconnected from “the will of the Lord” above. We see a negative and positive aspect of this command: 1) Do not get drunk with wine; but instead, 2) be filled with the Spirit. The idea Paul is communicating is that we are not to give up control of ourselves to alcohol. We are to be influenced, controlled and enlivened by the Spirit. God does not forbid alcoholic drinks; he forbids being drunk. The point is that we ought to be filled with the Spirit so that we are under His control alone. And this fits with the meaning of debauchery. Debauchery is a kind of living that is care-free and gives no thought to the consequences or the fallout of our decisions.

But notice that being filled with the Spirit produces something: 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. This is authentic worship in faith and obedience, by the filling of the Spirit that brings our lives under the Lord’s control and enables real joy in our relationships. And they are relationships where we are eager to prefer others.

## REFLECT AND RESPOND

As we close our time in the word, I want to take a brief moment to reflect on our passage and how it impacts us.

First, we are called to a *very* high standard as saints. Ultimately, no one can live up to that perfect standard...except Jesus. I am giving thanks right now with smile on my face and joy in my heart that it doesn’t depend upon my perfection that I am saved...but rather, the perfect life of Jesus who took my place as a sacrifice. Amen?! (This is where you say, AMEN! 😊) Praise God.

Second, this passage extends the previous passage about “walking in the new life” to “walking in the light”. And, in context helps us build our relationships as believers. As saints, we are to partner, join with, and primarily be influenced by fellow saints, God’s people. That takes a mindset of being committed to the study, teaching and discipleship as a believer under God’s Word. It means being controlled by the Spirit, choosing to

obey the commands God has given us, and not following worldly thinking and priorities. It means regularly prioritizing time with other believers. So, it's good to ask ourselves, what is controlling our choices?

Third, there is wisdom in how we live. Our aim is to please the Lord in all these three areas: Things we may *not* do. Thing we *must* do. And, in everything else. Our aim is to please God. These are not questions of "if we obey", but "how we practically live out that obedience". The "whats" and "hows". It can be difficult at times, but that's where God has provided fellowship with other saints to help. Are you taking advantage of that grace?

Fourth, it takes focused work to get this done. Paul tell us to make the 'best use of the time'. What is "best"? Best can only be understood by taking time to think and strategize how to Biblically judge what makes it "best", and how to bring God glory in the midst of it. Then we are to be self-disciplined, organized, and focused in carrying out the best use of our time. It doesn't happen by accident. It happens by being intentional in the way we use our time to please the Lord.

Let's walk in love and light. Let's work hard, even in the midst of a world that will increasingly slander and mock us for our choices. May God help us to carefully work out a lifestyle that reflects who we are and what He has done for us.