

July 19, 2020
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Ephesians
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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WALKING IN LIGHT Ephesians 5:11-21

The moon intrigues me. I always marvel at its consistent cycle of waxing and waning. I really love the full moons, especially when they are blood moons or supermoons and will probably take a picture if possible. The bright full moon looks like a brilliant light in the dark sky. Growing up where it snowed, I was often reminded of the line from *The Night Before Christmas* on some winter nights. “The moon on the breast of the new fallen snow, gave a luster of midday to objects below.”

On the fourth day of creation, our great Creator spoke two significant lights into existence. *And God made the two great lights – the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night – and the stars (Genesis 1:16)*. We know that God made the greater light, the sun, to be the source of light on earth. It is the generator of light. God made the lesser light, the moon, to reflect the light of the sun. This is so obvious as you watch the moon go through its phases throughout the month, night after night.

To me the moon is a wonderful illustration of what God created me to be. He created me in His image to reflect His character. He is the light, we are to be the reflection of that light. But sin changed the original order. While in many ways, the created being still reflects certain traits of our Creator, we fall far short of being an accurate reflection. Sin obscures the view, clouds the sky, makes the “moon” barely visible.

But God has provided regeneration through the sacrifice of Christ, by God’s grace, through faith in Christ, we are created anew. God raises us up to sit with Christ in the spiritual places (1:1-3:21). God’s lesson to us is that we who have been created anew in Christ’s

image ought to live our lives in a way that reflects His character. That is what the “walking worthy of our calling” is about (4:1). Having described how it is impossible for unsaved people to even begin to reflect Christ (4:17-19), Paul launched into various practical expressions of the worthy walk for us. In our text, we discover that we are reflecting the character of Christ when we avoid and expose sin and when we live according to practical, spiritual wisdom.

Avoid and Expose Sin (vv.11-14).

The text opens with a simple and blunt command (in fact this text contains many commands). God tells His people to avoid sin. *Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them (v.11)*. The command simply requires that we do not participate in unrighteous things. *Take no part* literally means “do not be a partaker together with.” This is important because that phrase, “together with” speaks of association as well as participation. We fail to reflect the glory of our sinless Savior when it appears that we are “all in” with sinful practices.

Furthermore, this is a present tense command which is not the same as a recommendation. Not being associated with works of darkness is a necessary discipline that we are responsible to put into practice. It doesn’t just happen. We work on not being identified with sinful practices. This requires that we regularly stop and assess if we are indicating by our lives that we are part of, in favor of sinful works.

We will have to be diligent to identify such things. What do they look like? What are the characteristics of these works? Sinful works are unfruitful. The idea of unfruitful obviously refers to trees that we expect to bear fruit but do not. Here it refers to people who do not do what they should do. God created us to reflect His character but sin prevents that from happening. Christ the vine redeems us branches, attaches us to Himself, so that we will bear fruit that reflects Him. But, association with, identification with, practice of sin makes us fruitless (no Christ-looking fruit).

This is so logical, so expected, so obvious. We ought to be able to spot followers of Christ very easily. His people ought to stand out in a world of sin. As the world becomes more and more wicked,

rebellious, stubborn against God, the people who live out the character of Christ as He has defined it in Scripture ought to be obvious. Identify and avoid such things.

We can identify such things because sin is of the darkness. This is a common use of the word darkness as it is contrasted to the light of God's truth revealed in Christ. In the beginning God split the darkness by creating light. The physical light is manifested by the sun and reflected by the moon. In the same way, Christ the light of truth, separates, sets aside, identifies the darkness simply by being.

Therefore, Jesus taught regarding Himself. *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life"* (John 8:12). That is the only option for true light that identifies sin. It expels darkness. We avoid sin, we have no participation with it, because Jesus said that is what His followers do.

We are able to identify sinful works of darkness because they are shameful works. *For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret* (v.12). The things mentioned here are generated by darkened understanding, alienation from God, hardness of heart, which results in sensuality (4:17-19). In very practical terms, those "things" look like lying, anger, stealing, corrupt talking, bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, malice (4:24-32). The "things" are also identified by several lists in Paul's writings and Jesus' teachings.

There was a day when especially the lying, murder, and sexual perversion was done in secret. Now such sin is committed publicly in broad daylight and glorified on television and in movies. Our consciences should not allow us to associate with these "things," these shameful, works that seep out of the darkness, these works that may kill the fruit of the Spirit and keep us from producing Christ-like fruit.

Having identified sin in order to avoid it, Christ's desire for His followers is to expose sin. We are to *take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them* (v.11). Okay, What constitutes exposure? What does it look like? To expose is to bring to light, to make obvious. The Greek word also means to rebuke, admonish, reproach. It is what John did regarding Herod's sin with his sister-in-law Herodias. John identified the adultery as sin and rebuked Herod for doing it.

It is necessary for us to expose sin because, by that exposure, dark and secret things become visible. *But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible* (v.13). This is a very practical truth. For example, how can a man work without a shop light? If a sheet rock finisher does his work in the dark, or even in limited lighting, it is very unlikely that he will do a good job. A good finisher will have a bright light on a stand that will reveal any flaws or dimples that he needs to correct.

The light that exposes the flaws and failures of sin is Jesus Christ and His teaching (i.e. the Bible). The Bible gives a sufficiently clear standard by which to measure the difference between righteousness and what does not meet righteousness. Christ expects His people to use the light of the truth of the Bible to identify, expose sin.

Sometimes that exposure is indirect in that we simply live righteously and our testimony of light will expose the sin of others. We cannot possibly, personally expose all the sin in the world or even in our town. Sometimes our exposure of sin is more direct. Direct exposure is explained in Matthew 18:15-17 where we learn how to respond when a brother commits sin. We go to him and expose the sin (tell him privately). If he listens, great; if he does not, we take a witness exposing the sin to another. If the sinning brother does not acknowledge the sin even with a witness present, we take him before the church exposing the sin to whole body. That is pretty direct exposure.

Or there are many commands in the New Testament letters about how we are to admonish one another. Paul wrote to the Christians in Thessalonica, *And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all* (1 Thessalonians 5:14). Certainly the church leaders are expected to expose sin. *As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear* (1 Timothy 5:20). *Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching* (2 Timothy 4:2). *He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it* (Titus 1:9). *One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons."*

This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith (Titus 1:12-13).

But we must be honest to admit that there can be problems with the “light.” When I sold men’s clothing, it was not unusual for a customer who was thinking about buying a suit, to say, “Let’s take this up to the front of the store so I can see it in daylight.” Artificial light is not always accurate. You can go to the big box store and buy bright lights, white lights, soft lights, yellow lights and so on.

So, too, we create problems when we try to expose or identify sin by our own preferred “light.” That is artificial light. My opinion is not the same as Scripture. My personal conviction is very important to me, but it does not carry the same authority as Scripture. Scripture is clear enough and normally understood well enough to set the viable standard for righteousness by which we expose sin. We use Scripture truth to expose sin and make it visible because visibility is light. *For anything that becomes visible is light (v.14a).* Light makes dark things visible. When sin is exposed, everyone sees how ugly and sick it really is.

Yes, but why bother? “Why not just live and let live?” some people wonder. Here is the reason: *Therefore it says, “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you” (v.14b).* This is a quotation from Isaiah 60:1. It reminds us that there are many sleepers who are dead in their sins. They need to see the light of Christ. You and I are the reflectors of that light. We must let our light, our reflection of Christ, shine boldly. How?

Live Wisely (vv.15-21).

Here we find the principle of the careful walk (vv.15-17). The careful walk comes about when we are responsible to walk wisely. The command is, *Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise (v.15).* Personal responsibility requires that we pay attention to how we are walking. Picture the person walking along a busy sidewalk looking at his or her phone. That is not responsible living.

To walk carefully, we must look at guides, road signs, measuring devices to tell us “how we are walking.” This letter to Ephesians is a good starting point for Christians to check their walk.

Ultimately, the whole Bible is the only right answer. Judge your life by the Bible. Discern whether you live according to wisdom.

Whose wisdom? The world offers a kind of wisdom. The influencers tell you what is acceptable and what is not. The self-proclaimed experts will let you know if you are out of touch and politically incorrect. In many ways, the world’s standard of wisdom is in direct conflict with God’s wisdom. Paul warned the Corinthian Christians, *For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? (1 Corinthians 1:19-20).*

The goal for Christ’s followers is to practice the wisdom of God. *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight (Proverbs 9:10).* *But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? God understands the way to it, and he knows its place (Job 28:12,23).* Most Christians are more aware of worldly wisdom than they are Bible wisdom, because they spend more time on social media and the internet than they spend in their Bibles.

The second aspect of personal responsibility that contributes to the worthy walk is to be responsible to redeem time. We are supposed to be *making the best use of the time, because the days are evil (v.16).* Time is a commodity. Unlike money, we are all given the same amount of time (24 hours each day). How do you manage yours? God’s challenge is for us to make the best use of it. So how do you waste time? What is the best use of time? Live every moment according to God’s wisdom.

Why? We must manage time well because we live in an evil day. We will easily be swept into works of darkness if we are not careful. Chaucer was right when he said, “The idle mind is the devil’s workshop.” – Chaucer (14th Century). (If indeed it was Chaucer who said that.) In this life only we are given opportunity to influence sinners with the light of Christ.

Third, we must be responsible to understand God’s will. *Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is (v.17).* What does foolishness look like? Foolishness squanders time. Foolishness is careless, unconcerned about your influence on

others. We are not supposed to be foolish. Rather, we are supposed to understand God's will. Notice Paul didn't say "find" God's will. God's will is not lost. God's will is written all over the pages of the Bible. We understand God's will while we are renewing our minds with His Word (Romans 12:2).

In verses eighteen through twenty-one, God gave us a handful of very practical expressions of the wise walk (vv.18-21). What does discerning and doing God's will look like? We have four requirements in one sentence.

First, we must select our influences wisely. *And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit (v.18)*. This is an example of the principle of exposing that we studied in vv. 11-13. In my opinion, alcohol abuse is a work of darkness that will definitely deter Christlike fruit production. The statistics in our culture and worldwide bear out the fact that it is pernicious evil.

Solomon, the wise man, affirmed this same truth when he pondered, *Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who tarry long over wine; those who go to try mixed wine. Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. In the end it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder. Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart utter perverse things. You will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, like one who lies on the top of a mast. "They struck me," you will say, "but I was not hurt; they beat me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake? I must have another drink" (Proverbs 23:29-35)*.

But that is not exactly what this text teaches. The text does not specifically forbid the use of alcohol, though I would. Here the command is to avoid getting drunk with wine because that is debauchery. Debauchery is behavior which shows lack of concern or thought for the consequences of an action, it is senseless deeds, reckless deeds, recklessness. The problem dealt with here is putting ourselves under the influence of wine instead of being under the influence of the Holy Spirit. God's will is for Christ's followers to be influenced, impacted, led by the Holy Spirit.

The only real question regarding wine in this text is, "What constitutes drunkenness?" The South Carolina Highway Patrol will answer that question for you. Try it sometime and you will be

surprised at how little consumption of alcohol will make you an outright sinner according to this text. And if the Highway Patrol rebukes you by exposing your sin, how much more should your fellow Christian expose your sin? That is what we are supposed to do.

Another practical aspect of the worthy walk is for us to build up other believers. We are to be *addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart (v.19)*. This is another area where we can try to expose sin based on our opinion or personal conviction. The command is for us to keep on speaking to ourselves, each other in music.

So what does a Christian in California do when the governor makes a rule that if Christians must be so bold as to meet together, they cannot sing? Is this not a clear command from God? Is this a Peter and John situation like when the authorities *called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:18-20)*. And later on, dealing with the same authorities, *Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29)*.

Or should Christians in California respond as we normally should respond to our governing authorities? *Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment (Romans 13:1-2)*. Those are hard questions to answer. At any rate, the text commands three genre of vocal music, the goal of which is *making melody to the Lord with all your heart*.

Third, walking the worthy walk means we will give thanks always. We are characterized by *giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (v.20)*. Now that is really hard to do. The requirement is that the attitude of thankfulness permeates everything we do or say. It is difficult but important for us to assess the troubles and trials of life and conclude, "Thank you, Lord." We make requests (and sometimes

complain) in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We must also give genuine thanks knowing that He who loves is working all things together for our good.

Finally, we are to submit to each other. We should be known as people who are *submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ (v.21)*. To submit is to bring under, to make subordinate. Practically, it requires us to arrange our plans, purposes, and desires under the plans, purposes, and desires of another. Notice that it is not because the other person is more important, more powerful, or more deserving than you and I are. We do this as a ministry showing our reverence to Christ. That is very much like the principle in 5:2 of Christ's sacrifice of love was TO God but benefitted us.

There are a few rules there, aren't there? In the past, on a few occasions, I have talked to a young man who was struggling with the rules of school or with the rules his parents' enforced at home. I smiled when on a couple of occasions guys in that situation told me they can't wait to get away from the rules by joining the army. Now there is a young fellow without much wisdom.

I also smile a little bit inside when I talk to people who have found the wonderful freedom of God's grace. It is true that God's amazing grace frees us from trying to gain salvation by keeping the law that kills us spiritually (Paul's argument in Galatians). But, as our text reveals, being freed from the condemnation of the law by grace does not free us from rules. Rather, the rules of God enduring moral law do not gain for us entrance into eternal life. They serve as mile markers, guide posts, signs, and fences to keep us walking on a path that leads to God getting glory for Himself. If we are really walking in the light of God's character, we will reflect His glory.