

Living As Children, Walking As Light

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[0 : 00] Well, there's a narrative in certain Christian circles that goes something like this. I used to be an addict. I used to be an alcoholic.

Or I was addicted to pornography. But when I became a Christian, the desire for that sin just left me. I was miraculously freed from its bondage.

And although this certainly can be true by God's grace, and maybe some of you have even experienced something similar, the vast majority of us continue to fall into some of the same sinful patterns that plagued us since long before we came to faith.

Even if you have experienced radical transformation in one area of your life, there's still failure in others. And the fact is, you still struggle with these sins because you enjoy them.

You desire them. Maybe you're wondering, why is there still so much darkness in my heart? Or maybe you're on the opposite end of the spectrum.

[1 : 13] You've been a believer as long as you can remember. And God in his grace has spared you from much of the darkness I just mentioned. You never participated in such things and have never felt their allure.

And you're beside yourself when you think about how other people could participate in these things. Sure, I mean, you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, just like everybody else.

But the unsaved version of yourself was still a pretty good person. You still struggle with sin. I mean, who doesn't? But none of the real egregious ones, right?

But your struggle to see the weight of your sin, to see its infinite offense before a holy God, is evidence of lingering darkness in your heart as well.

Or maybe you're like me, a combination of the two. You still feel the allure of really dark sins, lasting scars from a life spent walking in darkness.

[2 : 23] But you also feel apathy towards things that would seem to be shades of gray. Paul's going to tell us this morning as we open up Scripture that none of these categories are consistent with our identity in Christ.

Darkness, however dark, is the old you. It's the old me. We are now light in the Lord, so we must walk as children of light.

My hope is that in considering our new identity as light, we would better understand how to faithfully live as light. Please turn in your Bibles with me to Ephesians chapter 5, verses 3 through 14.

Ephesians 5, 3 through 14. And you'll want to keep your Bibles handy, because I'll be pointing us back to it quite a bit. But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.

Let there be no filthiness, nor foolish talk, nor crude joking, which are out of place. But instead, let there be thanksgiving. 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.

[3 : 59] Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore, do not become partners with them. For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

Walk as children of light. For the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true. And try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak at the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible.

For anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore, it says, Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.

Well, this is a complex passage. And it would be really easy to just gloss over it, focus on all the commands, and think, that's what Christianity is all about.

[5 : 08] In fact, that's pretty much how I felt during the time of the story that Rick shared. But this isn't God's list of do's or don'ts. If you want to be a Christian, don't do this.

Or, if you do this, God's going to punish you. This passage is about identity, not commands. Verse 8 is critical.

Everything's hinging on it, so let's take another look at it. Paul says, For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.

So remember, Paul's not just writing to people who, he's not just writing to people in general. He's writing specifically to the church.

And how does he begin Ephesians? He says, To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus. Paul's baseline assumption is that he's writing to people who already are Christians.

[6 : 13] In verse 8, he acknowledges that darkness is their past, not their present. And back in chapter 2, Paul writes, You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked.

You were following the Spirit at work in the sons of disobedience. You were, by nature, children of wrath. But God... Paul is talking to believers and his message is this.

Christian, you used to be darkness. That's the old you. But God is light. Now you are a child of God.

You are light. So walk accordingly. But what does it mean to walk? In the context of Ephesians, when we talk about walking, we're talking about how we as Christians are to live.

So really, walking is living. Maybe you notice the phrase back from chapter 2 that I quoted just a moment ago. He says, You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked.

[7 : 27] Walking is a theme that we see throughout Ephesians. In chapter 2, verse 10, Paul says, We're created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

And in chapter 5, verse 2, the verse just before this morning's text, we are to be, quote, imitators of God as beloved children and walk in love.

Our old selves walked in trespasses and sins. But that was the era of our death. We are now in a new era of life, and the living walk differently.

In our passage today, Paul further instructs us in three ways on how the Christian or the child of light is to walk or to live. So if you're taking notes, point number one, and this will be the longest one, the other two will be a bit shorter.

Point number one, children of light give thanks. Children of light give thanks. Number two, children of light try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

[8 : 43] Children of light try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. And number three, children of light expose darkness. Children of light expose darkness.

So number one, children of light give thanks. Let's look at verses three and four. But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you as is proper among saints.

Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. So, sexual immorality, impurity, covetousness, and various kinds of sinful speech are the old way.

They're the way that darkness walks. But the light-bearing alternative that Paul provides us to all of these sins is thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is not only presented as the opposite of these sins, but also the solution to these sins.

Let's take a look at these sins again. Sexual immorality, all impurity, and covetousness. One commentator writes this, Paul moves from the acts of immorality and uncleanness to their inner spring, greed, that insatiable desire to have more, even the coveting of someone else's body for selfish gratification.

[10 : 15] So, covetousness, or greed, is the force behind these sins. And it's all idolatry, according to verse 5.

It's worshiping the created over the creator. It's looking at God and saying, you're holding out on me. But Paul isn't simply forbidding these sins in verse 3. That would be redundant.

Indeed, he's already condemned them all in strikingly similar language back in chapter 4, verse 17 to 20. You can look back a page or so if you'd like.

Chapter 4, verse 17 to 20. He tells the church not to walk as the Gentiles do. He says, they have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy, to practice every kind of impurity.

No, Paul goes beyond the command not to commit these sins, and now he says, don't even talk about them. Listen to the wording in verse 3. These sins must not even be named among you.

[11 : 21] So do we never talk about them? Do we put our heads in the sand and pretend like they don't exist? Verse 4 is going to clarify. Let there be no filthiness, nor foolish talk, nor crude joking which are out of place.

You see, joking is a soft way of introducing these sinful desires into conversation that ultimately leads to their acceptance.

So it's easy to just categorize verse 4 as the locker room humor verse, but remember, this isn't just flippant conversation about sexual sins. Paul is telling us to have nothing to do with flippant conversation about all manner of idolatry.

So this isn't just addressing locker room humor among young men. I spent five years working in construction management before I went to China.

And I daily heard men complaining about their old lady, their ball and chain, and plenty of other phrases I can't utter in this room. Why are they unsatisfied with the gift God has given them and their wives?

[12 : 38] Unless we think the sinful speech of verse 4 is just a guy problem, wives, do you joke around with your friends that your husband doesn't do enough around the house? Moms, are you tempted to disguise grumbling about your children's disobedience with laughter by telling parenting war stories with other moms?

and what's behind a lot of our self-deprecating humor? We make fun of our weight, our intelligence, our lack of a skill in a particular area, our finances.

We're not giving thanks. Our jokes reveal our idolatrous discontent. we talk casually or make jokes about the areas of dissatisfaction in our lives.

It gives us a sort of gratifying release that we can't achieve in action, either because the desired act is so shameful, verse 12, or because it's simply not God's plan for us.

And this speech also promotes the spread of sin. It promotes the spread of sin. Make no mistake, if we talk about wickedness, sexual or otherwise, in a casual or joking way, we will soon walk in that wickedness quite casually.

[14 : 09] The sort of speech is dangerous because it seeks to call darkness light or just shades of gray. But for the Christian, there can be only light.

There's no room for darkness and there are no shades of gray. So preach the gospel to yourself.

The only appropriate response to the staggering blessings of the gospel is thanksgiving.

I'm going to list off a few of those blessings that Paul wrote in Ephesians. These all come from chapter 2, so you can look at them on your own later. He says, but God, being rich in mercy, made us alive together with Christ.

He showed us the immeasurable riches of his grace. We have been brought near. He has killed the hostility.

He has reconciled us all to God in one body. So remind yourself of these truths daily. And I'm intentionally sticking with the word thanksgiving and not switching over to the more common word thankfulness.

[15 : 20] I think it's significant that it's actually active. It's not just be thankful. He's saying give thanks. In our sinful flesh, thankfulness will not come effortlessly.

Here's a quick example regarding preaching the gospel to yourself. Consider your adoption in Christ. God loved you enough to lay down his own son to make you his son also.

You parents out there, you love your kids, right? You wouldn't give them up for anything. But God did. And he did it in love for you. So knowing that we're children of God and loved by him invites us to press deeper into relationship with him and find greater satisfaction in him than we would ever find in our idolatrous pursuits.

I don't know about you, but just remembering that I'm forgiven of a particular sin doesn't curb my desire for that sin. But knowing that I'm loved does.

Depth of relationship does. Our adoption in the gospel is an even greater gift than our forgiveness. It's probably our best tool in giving thanks and our best weapon in battling sin.

[16:47] So meditate on that and other truths that are similar to it. Meditate on them every day and drive yourself to thanksgiving. The fact is we have sufficient blessing in the gospel alone for thanksgiving to drive out our idolatry.

That is enough. But in our forgetfulness often it doesn't feel enough. praise God for Romans 8, 32. He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Yes, we have this eternal blessing but we also have many blessings in creation that redirect our minds to that eternal blessing.

Giving thanks even for God's earthly blessings is a way for light to shine in the darkness in our own hearts and in others. So combat lust and grumbling about your spouse with thanksgiving to God for the gift that he or she is to you.

If you're single and discontent in your singleness are you giving thanks to God for the other relationships that he has given you at this time? Maybe it's a close relationship with a parent or roommates or members of your small group.

[18:14] Are you covetous of a friend, their home, their income, their job? Are you giving thanks to God for his provision for you in your life?

If you're responding and speaking as those in darkness would speak about these things, you're going to walk the way that they walk. But when children of light give thanks in their speech, it promotes their own satisfaction in Christ and in the blessings of the gospel.

It curbs our desire to continue chasing the lies of idolatrous sins. And when others around us speak flippantly about these sins, our thanksgiving responses are a light that can expose the foolishness of their idolatry and point them to hope in Christ for their satisfaction.

So that was point number one. Children of light, give thanks. Number two, children of light, try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

Look back with me at verse one, just before this morning's passage. Paul says, be imitators of God as beloved children. I'm reminded of Jesus' words to the Pharisees in John 8, 44.

[19:37] He says, you are of your father the devil and your desire is to do your father's will. Your will is to do your father's desires. Just like Jesus said to the Pharisees, only in reverse.

If God is your father, your will is to do his desires. And in verse 10 of our passage today, Paul tells us that children of light try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord, their father.

Well, how do we know what pleases him? Look at the parenthesis in verse 9. He says, the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.

The child of light pleases the Lord when he or she walks in or lives out good works, righteousness, and truth. This all echoes Micah 6, 8.

If you'd like, you can turn there or you can just listen. Micah 6, 8. And Micah says, He has told you, O man, what is good.

[20:44] And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God? We have the Old Testament, and we certainly have the life of Jesus in the Gospels and the teachings of the Apostles.

With Scripture and the Holy Spirit as our guide, we are to test, examine, and walk in what is pleasing to the Lord in every aspect of our daily lives. Why would you continue to participate in the old way, the way of the sons of disobedience?

Their fate is clear in verses 5 and 6. Exclusion from the kingdom and the wrath of God. Why would you partner with them in the old way of death and darkness?

Do not partner means this. As light, do not act as darkness. Verse 8. At one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

These aren't locational, like living in darkness or living in light. Light is identifying who you are, Christian.

[22:09] Light is who you are, Christ the King Church. It's all about identity. If we view these as locational, then our response is, well, don't hang around the darkness crowd.

Don't spend too much time around sinners. Bad company corrupts good morals. Hang around the light. No. You are the light.

Christ the King Church, you are light. We have to be who we are. That is what pleases God.

So, regardless of your location, whether you're at church, or you're at work, or school, around Christians, or God-hating coworkers, neighbors, family, friends, be who you are. Be light. Walk in good works, righteousness, and truth. In darkness, we knew only exclusion and wrath.

[23 : 20] But in the light of Christ, our reality is now adoption and grace. We no longer have to try to please God.

We seek to please God in our light-bearing because of the fact that we already have his everlasting favor. We don't have to earn it. Last point, number three.

Children of light expose darkness. Children of light expose darkness. To what purpose?

What's the point? Is it calling a spade a spade? Policing the unbelieving world? Condemning those who are darkness?

darkness? No. Verse 13 and 14. Look with me there. He says, But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible.

[24 : 22] For anything that becomes visible is light. Transformation. Darkness becomes light. So in the beginning of verse 14, we're going from being exposed by the light to being transformed by that light.

I love this quote. Listen to this. An object that is illumined not only becomes visible, but may also take on luminosity.

That is, it glows as if it were the source of light itself. So the object becomes visible and then gives off light itself.

Think of the moon. It's a source of light in the darkness of night. But is it a star? No, it's just a chunk of gray rock.

But it's the object of the sun's light. It's illumined by the sun, and the result is the reflection of that light upon the earth at nighttime. And isn't that the case with us?

[25 : 29] Once darkened, now reflecting the light of the glory of Christ. Verse 14. Therefore it says, for this reason of transformation, it says, awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.

This isn't a direct quote from anywhere in scripture, but listen to Isaiah 60, 1-3. Isaiah 60, 1-3. Isaiah writes, Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

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, and the nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.

So, the glory of the Lord has shown on you. Once darkness, now light. So arise, and shine yourselves, and the nations will come to your light.

The goal in exposing darkness is not condemning in nature, but evangelistic. Through our light bearing, God summons the dead to awaken, and the ultimate light of Christ, of which we are a pale reflection, shines on them in the work of salvation.

[27 : 06] Well, the cross-cultural missions component is obvious in Isaiah 60. He says, nations shall come to your light. How are you a light to the nations?

Is Christ's light compelling you to seek the transformation of darkened souls around the world?

Maybe this means you talk to leadership here, and explore the process of entering the mission field.

If that's not you, then scripture would have you support those who are ministering in other cultures.

John Piper has famously said, go, send, or disobey.

And although financial support is certainly an important part of sending, it's not the only part. You also pray for missionaries. You get knowledgeable about missionary work, and you excite your fellow Christians about it, too.

Several of you, actually, reached out to Christy and I this past year during a time of crisis and family tragedy. Several of you encouraged us, and you told us you were praying for us.

[28 : 26] And that kind of stuff, by the grace of God, kept us there, and it kept us going. And last, we can pray specifically for unreached Muslims and Buddhists, Hindus and atheists around the world, that they would find the light of Christ.

To that end, I would recommend to everyone here, if you don't already have it, get yourself a copy of the book Operation World by Jason Mandrick. Again, the book's called Operation World by Jason Mandrick.

It's a great prayer resource. Learn about these unreached people groups around the world and pray for them. The other component of this verse I will call same-culture evangelism.

So we've got cross-cultural missions, and we've got same-culture evangelism. Now, same-culture evangelism involves building relationships with the lost and serving the needy around us in our own culture.

It's not mere Christian kindness, but the vehicle through which God transforms darkened hearts. evangelism. It's not mere Christian evangelism.

[29 : 47] It's not mere Christian evangelism. Evangelism cannot exclude bold proclamation of truth, but it also must include the good works, kindness, and righteous living that we're called to walk in.

Before I close in prayer, I want us to take a moment to reflect. Paul wrote specifically to Christians, to genuine believers, children of light, and so he speaks to us now as if we are.

But we must acknowledge that unbelievers, too, can read scripture and come to church and listen to sermons. So we must ask ourselves the question, Am I a child of light or a son of disobedience? If a son of disobedience, then repent. Darkness is your present, but it need not be your future.

Consider this message, the light of Christ, shining on you.

It's proof that he loves you. Don't retreat further into darkness, but be transformed by the message of the gospel. And rejoice in the presence of Christ and his holiness.

[31 : 20] If a child of the light, are you flirting with darkness, testing what's permissible? You're looking at it all wrong.

You need to repent. We shouldn't be thinking, which jokes can I get away with? Or is it okay to say this thought or that phrase?

If your speech isn't expressing thanksgiving, it's wasted speech. And Paul says it's foolish talk.

Thanksgiving speech is light-bearing speech.

It's the only speech that's consistent with our identity. Richly blessed, adopted children of God, children of light.

And finally, have no association with the sins of those who are darkness, but by all means, associate with those who are darkness.

[32 : 24] Jesus certainly did. You could accurately categorize his life as a walking association with sinners. Associate with sinners.

And patiently, gently, lovingly, boldly, shine. The light doesn't condemn.

God miraculously works through it, his light and our reflecting light, to transform darkened hearts.

Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for your word. I thank you for the forgiveness that we have in Christ.

And I thank you even more that we are not just forgiven, but we have been adopted and made your children. I thank you that our identity is no longer associated with our own sin and depravity, but it is associated with you and your holiness.

[33 : 44] Lord, I pray that we would be faithful children who honor their father. Lord, make us children who walk as we ought to walk, who speak as we ought to speak, not out of fear that you might crush us, but out of love because you never will.

You crushed your son instead. You made us your children and you love us and our identity is secure and nothing can take away your love from us. Lord, let us walk in confidence because of that truth and let us faithfully meditate on it every day.

amen. It's in your name I pray. Amen. Amen. Thank you.