

Walking as Children of Light

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[0 : 00] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! And I really could not tell the difference.

They all just look like these blurry little blobs up there. So then he would flip these different lenses in front of my eyes and he'd ask, is that better or worse? Better or worse?

And with each lens, the letters got clearer and clearer. And eventually I could see! It was a miracle! There was a difference between A and Z.

They're not the same letter. And they are literally as far apart as the alphabet will allow. Well, in a similar way, believers and unbelievers should not look the same.

[1 : 14] They should not blur together. Our godless culture celebrates sexual desire and fulfillment as all-important.

The endless marketing of the next toy or technology or trip. It's like this carrot of satisfaction just always dangling in front of our eyes. And it lures our hearts towards things of this world for contentment that we can just never seem to catch.

The world around us, it platforms those who, quote, live their best life. Which basically seems to mean whatever they do, whatever they want without reference to the God who made them.

The world applauds the arrogant, the brash, the self-reliant, the entertainer, the self-promoter. And over time, those in the church begin to think and to act like those in the world.

We are always at risk of becoming indistinguishable from the world around us.

[2 : 21] And this text that we have in front of us helps us see the difference. Paul, he sits us down in the chair and he pulls up two letters.

The sons of disobedience and the children of light. These two letters should not look the same. They should not sound the same.

So Paul holds up different lenses one at a time to bring clarity to these two letters. The lens of sexuality. The lens of our desires. The lens of our words.

And he wants us to see the difference. It's as far apart as A is from Z. Not only does he want us to see with clarity, we are intended to go and to live in light of who Christ is and who we are in him.

So I think very simply the main point for us today is turn from sin and live in thankful response to please the Lord who brought us to life.

[3 : 22] Turn from sin and live in thankful response to please the Lord who brought us to life. We'll break this out into three points. The first being act differently than the world.

Verses 3-4. Act differently than the world. So Paul begins this section by making some points of contrast. Sexual immorality, impurity, and covetousness should not even be named among the saints.

Now a saint is not a super Christian. Maybe you have that in your mind from growing up. Saint is simply the word for those who have been set apart by God.

Saints are God's chosen people. Set apart for his purposes. No longer like the Gentile sinners. But a new creation that's intended to be like God in righteousness and in holiness.

Saint is another word for Christian. Christian. So Paul is going to hold up sex, desires, and words in order to provide clarity between the beliefs and behaviors of Christians and the unbelieving world.

[4 : 35] So Greek culture was just rampant with sexual immorality. Adulterous relationships were very common. Men sleeping with their slave girls, incest, prostitution, homosexuality.

They're all part of just everyday life for them. And in Ephesus, there were even sacred sexual encounters in the local temples considered to be a part of their worship. So it makes sense that this illicit sexual activity was an enormous problem for new Gentile Christians to overcome in the early church.

This was their normal before conversion. And so Paul begins by addressing sexual immorality in verse 3. That word, it means any kind of sexual activity outside of a committed marriage relationship between one man and one woman.

Anything outside of that. And to clarify, Paul is not against sex. Later in chapter 5, the very chapter we're in, Paul gives a Christian vision for sex within marriage.

And it was God's good idea. It was his idea that's been hijacked by a God-defying world. And so sex is not the problem in Paul's view.

[6 : 00] Sin is. Klein Snodgrass said, Sin has been described as seeking to get more out of life than God put into it.

Very helpful. The unbelieving world expects sexual fulfillment to provide the satisfaction that only God can ultimately provide.

God's good gifts will always, always, always shift from gift to God when he's left out of the picture. So without reference to the creator of sex, the creation of sex is without boundaries and it takes over.

It's like fire. When it has good boundaries, it can be used to warm your house and cook s'mores. Wonderful. But without boundaries, as we've seen, it can burn down the mountainsides and it can consume your house.

Do you have God's good boundaries around the fire? While scrolling on your phone, in your movie selections, in your friendships, at work, in your neighborhood, and even in the church, do you have God's good boundaries?

[7 : 24] Be careful not to leave even one spark unattended. Next, Paul mentions impurity.

And interestingly, impurity might just be a bigger category, a bucket term that captures sexual immorality in it. But it can be traced upstream to the desires of the heart apart from God.

In fact, this is what we see Jesus say about the source of impurity in Matthew 7. He says, what comes out of a person is what defiles him. Out of the heart of man come evil thoughts and sexual immorality.

So Paul presses in on the theme of desire when he brings up the category of covetousness. The idea is that there is this insatiable desire to acquire more and more and more of what belongs to another.

Covetousness is a form of godlessness that really, it reveals where a person thinks contentment is going to be found. Do you think having his paycheck is going to make you happy?

[8 : 41] Do you think about getting their praise that will make you satisfied? Or do you think having her husband will make you content?

All the taking and desire to take will just stack up into one big heap of bitterness and dirt.

It always over promises and under delivers. In fact, John Piper said, covetousness is desiring something so much that you lose your contentment in God.

When contentment in God decreases, covetousness for gain increases. So what do you crave?

Paul is showing us that unbelievers crave the creation ultimately while the Christian craves the creator ultimately. These things should not be blurred together.

[9 : 49] There should be no mistaking one for the other. It should not even be close. In fact, Paul goes on to say that sexual immorality, impurity, and covetousness should not even be named among the saints.

That's what it says here. Should not even be named. Paul uses this word named in a strange way here. Because usually it refers to giving someone a name or a nickname based on a characteristic, kind of like the seven dwarves and Snow White.

You've got grumpy and sleepy and happy. Paul is saying that Christians should not be named these things. The words immoral, impure, covetous are names that should make no sense next to a Christian.

In other words, the general pattern of our lives should make these names sound absurd when held up next to us. Like a seven-foot basketball player being called Shorty or a chihuahua being called Goliath.

They should be so opposite of who we are, it should be laughable. It should be laughable. Are the names laughable when held up next to you?

[11 : 07] Would the name sexually immoral be laughable if it were held up over your phone history? Would the name covetous be laughable if held up over your thought life this past month?

The names must not stick. They must not stick. Paul goes even further in verse 4 to highlight a difference in the use of our words. Let there be no filthiness, he says, nor foolish talk, nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.

Our Lord said, out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks. The heart is the control center for the mouth. And if our hearts are set apart for the Lord, then so must our words be too.

Because our words are intended, like all things, to bring honor to God and to build others up. So it only makes sense that Paul demonstrates that the polar opposite purpose is represented by the speech of the godless.

There is filthiness. Words used to shock or entice or to shame or defile. There's foolish talk.

[12 : 35] Purposeless and frivolous. It's unthinking. It's undiscerning. It's unwise. And then there's crude joking. This could be a reference to just vulgarity, but it probably has more in view than just nasty jokes.

In fact, Aristotle, philosopher, he used the word to refer to what he saw as a virtue. The ability to turn a phrase. So this actually is even using wittiness and facetiousness, degrading jokes at somebody else's expense.

It's the use of wit to tear others down and to build yourself up. Words are good gifts. But just like all the other gifts, they can be twisted into sin when used for selfish purposes that push God to the outside.

What do people come away with after being around your words? Do your words tend to leave people thinking more about how great you are or how great Christ is?

That's the difference we want. Godless words are out of place for the Christian. Paul says that the alternative that stands in contrast to these kinds of words and all of these actions are thanksgiving.

[14 : 02] Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving. It seems like a surprising first choice whenever you're holding up sexual immorality, filthiness, crude joking. Maybe, like me, you expected to see something like purity or holiness in contrast.

But gratitude to God is not just an appropriate response to God's kindness towards us in Christ. It is the motivating force for aligning our lives with His purposes and His demands.

Thanksgiving. Think about Thanksgiving. To give thanks, it pushes us outside of ourselves. Fundamentally. The very nature of giving thanks demands that we understand ourselves as recipients.

That's what it does. This is the extreme opposite of those who rebel against God. In fact, look at Romans 12:1. For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him.

But they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened. This is upstream. To sin, if you want to counteract sexual immorality, covetousness, and the sins of the tongue, express thankfulness to God.

[15 : 28] Klein Snodgrass, once again, he said, it's difficult to both give thanks and sin at the same time. Virtually impossible.

So if you want to smash sin down, give thanks. Spend time rehearsing God's undeserved kindness towards you and you will find that His bountiful grace will push sin and self-focus out of the picture.

That's what will happen. Secondly, align your life with Christ. Verses 5 through 7. After giving us several points of contrast, Paul then moves to give us some substantial motivations to not partner with unbelievers.

We should instead align our lives with Christ. If you look at verse 5 with me, it says, 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.

It starts with this word for, a pivotal word, you may be sure of this. And then he holds up this concept of idolaters. It's the first time this pops up.

[16 : 57] Idolaters have no part of Christ's kingdom is his point. So why does Paul add that word idolater? Those who practice these sins place self-gratification at the center of their life and purpose so that they worship the creature rather than the creator.

It's idolatry. Covetousness is the desire to put together your kingdom for your pleasure and so that you can rule over your world as supreme.

That's what it does. So Paul is saying here, you can't usurp God's throne and then claim to be a servant in his kingdom at the same time.

if you live in such a way that rejects God as king right now you are living in anarchy and you have no inheritance in the kingdom of God.

This is surprising because an inheritance is more than a benefit of being a citizen in a kingdom. it's a birthright given to a son in a family.

[18 : 17] So the implication is that those who are aligned with Christ will be heirs as royal children in the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is God's present reign.

It's not a place it's his reign right here and now which will culminate in the future with the complete and final renewal of his people in all the universe.

Believers at that time will receive their full inheritance and they will enjoy we will enjoy living in the presence of the father and the son unobscured by sin and death forever.

That's an incredible incredible joy and vision for our future and Paul is making it clear here who is with the king and who is not. I mean just imagine for a moment being at a Vols game you know we're in the stadium you're you're looking around you look up in the fan section in that sea of orange and there's one crimson red shirt just sitting in there.

Okay so they may be sitting together but his pain is Big Orange's game right? That's what we think as the game goes forward that guy's sorrows and our joys will be the opposite of each other right?

[19 : 44] Because our allegiances are opposite. Paul is showing that what you celebrate reveals who you belong to.

What you celebrate reveals who you belong to. He goes on in verse 6 let no one deceive you with empty words. For because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

Paul is a good pastor. He's committed to guarding against false belief because beliefs have consequences and wrong beliefs can be deadly.

Deadly. Perhaps the most deadly is believing that professing Christians can pray a prayer walk an aisle or even be baptized and then after that lead unrepentant and sinful lives.

Do not believe that lie. Do not believe that lie. The wrath of God is coming on those living in rebellion. People often shy away from talking about God's wrath but God's wrath is an expression of his love.

[20 : 57] For God to be loving he has to hate sin. It's the opposite of love. Sin is death. So he has to hate it if he's going to be truly loving.

If someone tried to hurt my children I would be a poor excuse for a dad if I did not respond in anger and drive away the attacker in a much greater way.

God love. His love has to respond rightly to sin with just anger. And those who are under God's wrath are the sons of disobedience.

And these aren't the people who commit the occasional act of disobedience. These are men and women whose lives are characterized by disobedience. They don't want to submit to God's authority.

They prefer to rule their own lives to go their own way. And Paul is pleading with us do not become partners with the sons of disobedience.

[22 : 07] And it's a worthy plea to obey. But what does God mean? What does Paul mean by not becoming partners? Does he mean just stay away from all unbelievers?

Is that what he means? And then how much separation is enough? Well, we know from Paul's letter to the Corinthians that he does not mean that we should have no contact with sinful unbelieving people.

That's not what he's talking about. In fact, some of the folks in the Corinthian church thought that's what he meant, and so he clarifies his position in 1 Corinthians 5. He says, I wrote to you in my letter not to associate, don't partner, with sexually immoral people.

not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or the idolaters. There's all of our words there. Since then, you would need to go out of the world.

So Paul's main concern for us here in Ephesians is not that they separate from people altogether. His main concern is that they do not join in and delight in sinful rebellion.

[23 : 19] especially when they profess to be Christians. In that same letter to the Corinthian church, Paul addresses a situation of a man living in blatant sexual immorality by sleeping with his mother-in-law, and he's professing to be a Christian.

By the way he's behaving, he's aligning himself with the enemy. It's as if he's wearing the orange in the sea of orange fans.

He's sitting on the orange side, but he keeps rejoicing at every advance of the other team. Every time the other team scores, he's standing up, pumping his fists, he's revealing his true allegiance.

So Paul's warning to not partner means don't align yourself with the opposing side, don't delight in what God hates. sin. In other words, be with sinners and don't be a sinner.

But then Paul makes it clear that this kind of partnership is not just arbitrary like a preference for a football team in a game. Partnership here is a matter of life and death.

[24 : 36] We have to have clarity because the wrath of God is being poured out on sin. Do not align yourself with sin. Imagine you hear a distant voice during a huge thunderstorm outside.

So you quickly stick your head outside and see a man on top of the roof hugging a lightning rod. He is defying the storm. The lightning is just following all around him with loud cracks.

They're going off like warning flares. Don't do this. And yet, he is singing and dancing and with a big grin on his face he calls out to you, come on up! This is great!

This is God's wrath towards the sons of disobedience. But he is slow to anger. He is abounding in steadfast love.

Even now, right now, he is withholding his wrath so that you might have another opportunity to hear. So that you can stop defying him.

[25 : 43] And maybe you're wondering how you can align yourself with God's side. Maybe you don't want to live in rebellion against him anymore and you wonder how can I be good enough?

My friends, the reality is that we all were sons of disobedience deserving of God's wrath. Ephesians 2 makes that clear.

My friends, the gospel is the good news which resolves the problem of God's wrath for the sons of disobedience. Jesus came, fully God and fully man, in order to live a perfect life and then stand in our place to absorb God's just wrath against our sin.

John Stott wonderfully said, the cross represents divine satisfaction through divine substitution. That's what's going on. the cross is the lightning rod of God.

Christ absorbed the wrath of God for our sin in our place. So if you turn from your sin and trust in Christ for forgiveness, you will be made right with God and granted entry into his kingdom and even more importantly into his family.

[26 : 57] John 3 36 holds this out for you. Whoever, whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. Whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life but the wrath of God remains on him.

It's as clear as A to Z. This is why a Christian cannot partner with the sons of disobedience. Can we be spared from such wrath by Christ on the cross and then delight in the sin that put him there?

to rejoice in the sexual immorality, the impurity, the covetousness, the corrupt words, to rejoice in these things would be to take the hammer and take another swing at him while he's on the cross.

Do not be partners. Lay the hammer down and bow before the king. Point three, walk as children of light.

the difference between believers and unbelievers is as stark as darkness and light. So Paul goes on to apply this rich symbolism to help us see the implications.

[28 : 16] If you look at verse eight there, it says, for at one time you were in darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Notice it says you were darkness, darkness, not just in darkness.

You were darkness. So this is not about their surroundings. It's not about the things out there, it's about their very nature, our very nature.

The language characterizes the core of their being before Christ. We were not, let me say it again, we were not essentially good people who stumbled or strayed off the path.

We were dark by our very nature. Remember Ephesians 2, you can look at it yourself, said we were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind, all of us.

And so as a result, darkness and sin become the characteristic and defining condition of humanity. Think about the environment darkness creates. You can't see.

[29 : 25] it's easy to get disoriented and lost. It's terrifying. You can't function. Nothing can grow. It lends itself to the feeling of hopelessness and vulnerability.

It is the domain where the unredeemed live. It's where the power, the control and the influence of evil is compellingly felt. It's why you don't see scary movies that are all light and colorful.

This is where we are when we are on our own. But now, now it says, you are light. You were darkness, but now you are light.

Your nature has changed from darkness to light. And this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God. You change in nature by virtue of being in the Lord.

Notice the words there. You are light in the Lord. Throughout Scripture, the Lord is depicted as light wonderfully. Psalm 27, the Lord is my light and my salvation.

[30 : 39] New Testament, Jesus said, I am the light of the world. By being united with the Lord, we experience a change in our identity. We are transferred from darkness to light.

Christ has done this so that now we can walk. We can walk. We are to walk as children of light.

This stands in utter contrast to the sons of disobedience, darkness and light. Sons of disobedience, children of light. Now that we've been united with Christ, we must walk in the manner of Christ.

Wonderfully, verse 9 says that the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true. I have some plants in my office, but I have no windows, so they are all withered and dead.

That's just the facts. The missing ingredient, light. Probably a little love, but mostly light. Same is true with our lives.

[31 : 45] When we were in darkness, we did not produce this kind of fruit. But the fruit of Christ's light consists of all that is good and right and true.

Our new identity in Christ reflects the character of God himself. God is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

We just said that this morning. There is no other God beside God, a righteous God and Savior. He is the true and living God. True.

All of the fruit of light flows from his own character. So my friends, we must see that being good, right, and true are all byproducts of being Christians saved by grace.

There is not a set of prerequisites. None of those have to be in place beforehand to find acceptance with God.

[32 : 51] We don't earn his kindness. We live in response to his kindness by overflowing his character to other. And now we live, as verse 10 says, to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

That's our ambition now, to discern what's pleasing to him. This is not a call to search out some kind of cryptic secret will of God. That's not what this is calling us to.

He has wonderfully revealed all that we need in his word for salvation and to live godly lives. So one of the ways we walk is by trying to understand how to live in a God honoring way in every situation.

The Bible gives general principles that are to be applied to specific areas of our lives. Verse 11 says, take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness.

So if you want to combat the temptation to partner with the enemy in the darkness, then busy yourself with walking in the light. Don't see how close you can get to the edge of immorality.

[34 : 03] the goal of our lives is not to see how close you can be to the world without crossing the line. That's not the point of the Christian life. Rather than seeing how you can just not commit adultery or how I can just not look at pornography today, make it your ambition instead to get a biblical PhD and your wife study her.

Commit yourself to study her likes and her dislikes. Fill your mind with ways to serve and to surprise her. And then fill your days with exploring new ways to show Christ's love for her.

You won't have time for all the stupidity that you used to entertain. It's just the truth. Study her. Study your job.

What is every possible way you can honor God in your work? Think about it. Give time to it. Don't just fumble your way in and fumble your way out and do the minimum.

How can you improve? How can you serve your co-workers to the glory of God when you enter those doors? What does the Bible teach about parenting? How can you honor God with your kids?

[35 : 17] What can you teach them? Throw yourselves into that. How can you throw your life into the local church? What can you do? What gifts can you bring?

What things can you ask God to equip you with so that you can serve even if you feel awkward or unequipped? Who are the people that you can encourage or reach out to? Life is just teeming with opportunity as you walk in the light.

Everywhere you look there's opportunity. Start with what you know that God delights in and you will find that there is less and less room for the unfruitful works of darkness in your life.

We are to take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness but instead it says in verse 11 expose them for it is shameful even to speak of the things that are done in secret.

Where there are unfruitful works that go against God's good design we are to expose them expose here it's using this imagery of darkness being flooded and dispelled by light.

[36 : 29] There can be a couple applications of this one option is that these are unfruitful works of darkness practiced by other professing Christians around you. Or another option is that these are unfruitful works of darkness practiced by unbelievers.

Well in either case the goal is not to bring condemnation. But to bring light to bring help it could be a conversation with an unbeliever to help them see that the trajectory of their lives is going to a dead end by believing false things that's shedding light and helping them or it could be drawing out a believer professing believer who seems to be wandering or choosing seemingly foolish or ungodly choices help them.

This is not done to condemn. The goal is to draw out of the shadows ask questions for their good and light will do its work. It will.

Verse 13 says but when anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible for anything that becomes visible is light. Once something in the darkness comes to light one of two things will happen.

either they will pull back into the shadows and continue on in darkness or they will turn and be grateful to be in the light as painful as it can be when it comes out and experience more growth glorious God glorifying growth fruitfulness so we must be a community we must be a church willing to expose the dark to the light we have to be that we must be willing to confront one another in love not to condemn but to bear fruit do you need to bring something to the light today do you want to be done hiding in the shame and in the shadows do you want to be done with that let today be the day let today be the day I'd be glad to talk with you if you've been hiding in the shadows

[38 : 50] I want to call you with this hope filled hymn in the last verse wake oh sleeper and arise from the dead and Christ will shine on you this is a promise this is what he does you don't have the power to come out of the grave yourself you cannot do this you are dead you cannot do this but we have a savior who has conquered the grave that's what we've!

he is mighty to save he's the same one who released the demoniac so that he no longer lived among the tombs that's who we have on our side he's the same one who called Lazarus out from the dead and now he's calling to you wake up receive life in the name of Jesus Christ this is his offer he can raise you up out of the darkness!

he can breathe! life into you he can change you from darkness to light do you want that? I want that I want that in my life I want more light in my life let us be a church Trinity Grace let us be a church that turns from sin and live in thankful response that's what we have to give him thankful response to please the Lord who brings us to life may God help us oh Lord thank you that you pursued us even when we were enemies sons of disobedience children of wrath running away from you you chased us down with your light light has shown on our hearts through the gospel of

Jesus Christ and we are forever grateful there's nothing we can do to pay you back so Lord we just respond with praise and adoration and thankfulness may we be more transformed because of this day to walk forward as children of light for our good and your glory we pray these things in the name of Jesus Amen You've been listening to a message at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens For more information about Trinity Grace please visit us