

Be Imitators of God

Walk in Light

Ephesians 5:8-14

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Scripture

Last week I began a sermon series in Ephesians 5:1-21 that I am calling, “Be Imitators of God.”

In his letter to the Ephesian Christians, the Apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:1a, “Therefore be imitators of God.” That is Paul’s overall command for this section of Scripture. He then gave three ways in which Christians are to be imitators of God. First, Christians are to walk in love (which we examined last week). Second, Christians are to walk in light (which we will examine today). And third, Christians are to walk in wisdom (which we will examine next time).

So, let’s read about walking in light in Ephesians 5:8-14:

⁸ ...for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), ¹⁰ and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. ¹³ But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, ¹⁴ for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

**“Awake, O sleeper,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”** (Ephesians 5:8-14)

Introduction

The men in Jesus’ day were required to go to Jerusalem

three times a year to celebrate three great Feasts: (1) the Feast of Unleavened Bread, (2) the Feast of Harvest, and (3) the Feast of Ingathering, also known as the Feast of Booths, or the Feast of Tabernacles (*cf.* Exodus 23:14-17).

The Feast of Ingathering took place around mid-October and lasted for 7 days. It was associated with the end of the harvest season. The people of God also camped in shelters, or tents, in the open fields outside the city of Jerusalem. It was a reminder of the wilderness wandering of the people of God; hence, this Feast was also known as the Feast of Booths.

During the second year of Jesus' ministry, he was in Jerusalem for the Feast of Ingathering. Commentator Kent Hughes says that on the final evening of the Feast there was a spectacular nighttime ceremony known as the Illumination of the Temple. That event took place in the Temple treasury before four massive golden candelabra topped with huge torches. It is said that the candelabra were as tall as the highest walls of the Temple, and that at the top of three candelabra were mounted great bowls holding sixty-five liters of oil. There was a ladder for each candelabrum, and when that evening came, healthy young priests would carry oil up to the great bowls and light the protruding wicks. Eyewitnesses said the huge flames which leapt from these torches illuminated not only the Temple but all of Jerusalem and its surrounding fields. *The Mishnah* tells us that "Men of piety and good works used to dance before them [the candelabra] with burning torches in their hands singing songs and praise and countless Levites played on harps, lyres, cymbals and trumpets and instruments of music."¹ Imagine the smell of the oil, the heat of the smoking torches, and

¹ Herbert Danby, trans., *The Mishnah* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 180, *Sukkah* 5:2-3.

the shadows of perspiring, bearded priests as they whirled and danced before the fire-dazzled throng. This exotic rite celebrated the great pillar of fire (the glorious cloud of God's presence) which led the Israelites during their sojourn in the wilderness and spread its fiery billows over the Tabernacle.

The morning after the Illumination of the Temple, Jesus spoke to a great crowd of people and proclaimed, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). Hughes writes:

There could scarcely be a more emphatic way to announce one of the supreme truths of Jesus Christ! Christ was saying in effect, "The pillar of fire that came between you and the Egyptians, the cloud that guided you by day in the wilderness and illumined the night and enveloped the Tabernacle, the glorious cloud that filled Solomon's Temple, is me!"—"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). He is everything suggested by the sublime metaphor of light—and much more.²

Jesus is the light of the world! It is this truth that we must keep in mind as we study today's text. Paul calls Christians to be imitators of God. And we imitate God by walking in light.

Lesson

The analysis of the concept of imitating God in Ephesians 5:8-14 teaches us to walk in light.

Let's use the following outline:

1. We Walk in Light by Exhibiting Light (5:8-10)
2. We Walk in Light by Exposing Darkness (5:11-14a)
3. We Walk in Light by Exhorting Unbelievers (5:14b)

² R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 161–164.

I. We Walk in Light by Exhibiting Light (5:8-10)

First, we walk in light by exhibiting light.

Paul said in verse 8a, “...for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.” Paul was writing to the believers in the church of Ephesus. Prior to their salvation, believers were darkness. However, following their conversion to Christ, believers now are light in the Lord.

Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse, a master of illustration, explained it this way:

When Christ was in the world, he was like the shining sun. When the sun sets, the moon comes up. The moon is a picture of believers, the Church. The Church shines, but not with its own light. It shines with reflected light. At times the Church has been a full moon dazzling the world with an almost daytime light. Those were times of great enlightenment—for example, in the days of Paul and Luther and Wesley. At other times the Church has been only a thumbnail moon, and in those days very little light shone on the earth. But whether the Church is a full or thumbnail moon, whether waxing or waning, it reflects the light of Christ. Our light does not originate with us.³

But, Paul suggests that believers are more than a reflection of the light of Christ. We actually *become light ourselves*. Read verse 8a again, “...for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.” That is staggering! Of course, our light is derived from Christ. It exists because of our union with Christ. But not a ray of light comes from ourselves.

Because of our union with Christ, Paul commands believers in verse 8b, “Walk as children of light.” Just as Jesus is

³ James M. Boice, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1972), 80.

the light of the world, so Christians are to walk as he walked—as lights of the world. In fact, in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5:14a, Jesus said to his followers, “You are the light of the world.”

But, in exactly what way are believers “**light**”? Paul described the characteristics of light in verse 9, “...for the **fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true.**” The phrase “**the fruit of light**” describes the result of union with Christ. Christ, who is God, is **good** and **right** and **true**. As his imitators, Christians do that which is **good** and **right** and **true**. Tony Merida describes the meaning of “**good and right and true**” when he writes, “Here this trio of virtues seems to be a summary of the ethical content previously covered in Ephesians and resembles the fruit of the Spirit. Those who walk in light do ‘good works’ (2:10), they live righteously (4:24), and they speak truthfully (4:15).”⁴ Kent Hughes says that these three qualities are “the fruit of sterling character.”⁵

Corrie ten Boom tells how during hard times in the watchmaking business, when the family was in extreme financial need, she observed her father and a wealthy customer. The wealthy man had decided to purchase a costly timepiece with cash which would have met all their needs. But as her father was handling the cash, the customer related that he was buying the watch because Mr. Ten Boom’s young competitor could not fix the fine old watch. Corrie’s father asked to see it, opened it, made a slight adjustment, and handed it back saying, “There, that was a very little mistake. It will be fine now. Sir, I trust the young watchmaker. Someday he will be just as good as his father. So if you ever have a problem with one of his

⁴ Tony Merida, David Platt, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians* (Nashville: B&H, 2014).

⁵ R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, 165.

watches, come to me. I'll help you out. Now I shall give you back your money and you return my watch.”

Corrie watched horrified as she saw the exchange, and then observed her father open the door for the man and bow deeply in his old-fashioned way. She flew at her father in reproof, only to be herself reproved by his patient regard through his steel-rimmed glasses and his gentle question, “Corrie, what do you think that young man would have said when he heard that one of his good customers had gone to Mr. Ten Boom? Do you think that the name of the Lord would be honored? As for the money, trust the Lord, Corrie. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills and he will take care of us.”⁶ That is a powerful example of **all that is good and right and true**.

Finally, in order to encourage believers to walk in light by exhibiting light, Paul said in verse 10, “**...and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.**” The phrase “**try to discern**” (*dokimazo*) means “to try, prove, discern, distinguish, approve. It has the notion of proving a thing whether it is worthy or not.”⁷ In other words, as Christians exhibit what is **good and right and true**, they will, as John MacArthur says, “give verification or evidence that they are who they claim to be, children of God and of light.”⁸

II. We Walk in Light by Exposing Darkness (5:11-14a)

Second, we walk in light by exposing darkness.

Paul said to believers in verse 11, “**Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.**”

⁶ Corrie ten Boom, “Trust the Lord,” *Guideposts Magazine* (August 1976), 7.

⁷ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

⁸ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 210.

This is an echo of what Paul wrote in verse 3, “But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you.” This view is strengthened by what Paul said in verse 12, **“For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret.”** What unbelievers do is **darkness**. Christians must not do what they formerly did. Nor must Christians take part in any way in **the unfruitful works of darkness**. Christians must **instead expose them**, that is, Christians must expose **the unfruitful works of darkness**.

But how are Christians to do that? How do we **take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness** and yet still **expose them**? Amy Carmichael was born in Ireland in 1867 and became a missionary with the Church of England. She went to India and opened an orphanage and founded a mission in Dohnavur. She served in India for 55 years without furlough and wrote many books about her missionary work there. However, what is less known about Amy Carmichael is the difficulty she had in raising support for her missionary work. She wanted to go to India to expose the temple prostitution of children in India. But, because of the Victorian sensibilities of the time, it was impolite for her to mention the horror that thousands of children faced. Thankfully, Amy was committed to exposing **the unfruitful works of darkness**. She eventually did raise the money and did expose **the unfruitful works of darkness**.

And that is what Christians are still called to do today. We are to walk in light by exposing darkness. Sometimes we do that simply by our presence. Shortly after I became a Christian, I attended the University of Cape Town. I played rugby for my dormitory in the intramural league. At one point, there was a tournament and I happened to win the Most Valuable Player award. Because of winning the award, I had to attend the ceremony and party. I really did not want to go because I knew

they would be a lot of drunkenness and carousing. But I had to attend. At one point during the festivities, I was with a group of team mates. They were telling stories and one of them used a profanity. He immediately looked at me, stopped, apologized, and no longer used any profanity. He did that because he knew I was a Christian. So, sometimes Christians expose darkness simply because of our presence.

However, at other times we must speak up. When unbelievers say things that are contrary to God's truth, it is appropriate to correct them and explain God's word to them. For example, it is common to hear people take God's name in vain. They will say things like, "Oh God!" Or, "For Christ sake!" Remind them that they are violating the third Commandment not to take the Lord's name in vain (Exodus 20:7).

Our resource for exposing **the unfruitful works of darkness** is the word of God. The Psalmist said in Psalm 119:105, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." That is why Paul said in verses 13-14, **"But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light."** Actually, a better translation for verse 14b is, "for it is light that makes everything visible." So, verses 13-14 would read as follows, **"But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible."** That is why it is so important for Christians to know God's word. It is the light of God's word that exposes darkness.

III. We Walk in Light by Exhorting Unbelievers (5:14b)

And finally, we walk in light by exhorting unbelievers.

Paul said in verse 14b, **"Therefore it says, 'Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on**

you.’ ” Some commentators say that these words are part of an early Christian hymn. That may be so. It is also likely that these words were adapted from Isaiah 60:1, which reads, “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.” These words are prophetic and find their fulfillment in none other than Jesus Christ, the Messiah for whom every godly Jew had so long hoped.

“O sleeper” describes every unbeliever who walks in darkness, produces “the unfruitful works of darkness,” and is unaware of his lost condition and tragic destiny. That is why we who walk in light must exhort unbelievers to **“awake”!**

“Arise from the dead” is the exhortation to repent. It is an appeal to the unbeliever to turn from the **dead** ways of sin.

“Christ will shine on you” is the good news of the gospel that God has provided a remedy for every sinful who person who repents of sin and believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of sinners.

John MacArthur tells the story of a great fire in Edinburgh, Scotland, in which people hurried to exit the building through a passage that led to the street. They were almost safe when a rush of smoke met them, blowing into the passage from the outside. Instead of running through the smoke, they entered a door into a room that seemed safe. But soon all the oxygen was exhausted and they all suffocated. If only they had seen the light they might have lived.

Horatius Bonar wrote:

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
 “I am this dark world’s light;
Look unto Me, thy morn shall rise,
 And all thy day be bright.”
I looked to Jesus, and I found

In Him my star, my sun;
And in that light of life I'll walk,
Till traveling days are done.⁹

If you are not yet a believer in Jesus Christ, I exhort you today to **“Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”**

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the concept of imitating God in Ephesians 5:8-14, let us walk in light.

Brothers and sisters, we imitate God by walking in light. And we walk in light by exhibiting light, exposing darkness, and exhorting unbelievers. Let us make a commitment to do that every day so as to reflect the light of God that is in us.

John MacArthur tells us that Proverbs 4:18 sums up the words of the Apostle Paul: “But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day.”¹⁰

May that be true for every one of us who professes faith in Jesus Christ, the light of the world! Amen.

⁹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, 214.

¹⁰ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, 214.

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is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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