

Walk as Children of Light

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, ESV*

Introduction: Remember Who You Are

In one of the great moments in cinematic history, the ghost of Mufasa says to young Simba, who has run away in fear from his uncle, Scar, “Remember who you are.” It’s good advice, and not just for young lions who need to face down their uncles and set things right in the lion kingdom.

In chapters 4 and 5 of Ephesians, Paul has been emphasizing how Christians are to walk, or live. He began in Ephesians 4:1 by saying, “*I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called*” and then later in verse 17, he gave the negative, “*Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.*”

So far, in chapter 5, he has elaborated on what it means to walk worthy of the calling to which have been called by saying, “*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*”

Now here, he begins this section by reminding the Ephesians of who they were and who they are now and then calls them to “walk as children of light.” If we take all of these exhortations together – walk worthy of the calling to which you have been called, walk in love as imitators of God, walk as children of light – all of it could be summarized with the words “Remember who you are” or perhaps “Live what you are.”

I. Live What You Are

A. You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord

As Paul has already done several times in this letter, he reminds the Ephesians of what they were and what they are now. But this contrast between past and present is perhaps the most surprising. In chapter 2, he told the Ephesian believers that . . .

- they were once dead in sins and trespasses but now God has made them alive,
- that they were once alienated and hostile, far away from God, but now they have been reconciled and brought near to God, granted access to God as their Father
- that they were once aliens and strangers but now are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God

In chapter 4, Paul told the Ephesians to put off their old self, which is corrupt with deceitful desires *“and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”*

But now, Paul takes the old and new, past and present contrast to a new level: “You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.” He doesn’t say, “You once walked in darkness, but now you walk in the light” or simply “You were once in darkness, but now you are in the light.” No, what he says is much stronger, clearer and more compelling: You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

On our own, apart from Christ, we are not just in the darkness, but we are darkness. Rather, we were darkness. Paul is so clear in emphasizing that the old, sinful, darkness that we were is in the past. It’s what we were, but it’s not who we are now. Now, we are light in the Lord. It is only in the Lord that we can be light, rather, that we are light. This is who and what we are.

Satan is constantly telling us that we’re not who we should be, not what we want to be, not worthy, not sufficient, not capable. He wants us to live in the past, in the reality of who and what we used to be – dead in sins and alienated from the life of God, darkness. Well, I may not be the man I want to be. I know I’m not what God will one day make of me. But I also know I am not what I once was. By the grace of God, I am what I am and God tells me that I am light in the Lord.

In fact, if I am “in the Lord,” then I cannot help but be light because the Lord is light, and if I am in Him and He is in me, then I am light in the Lord. That’s not a boast about my character or conduct but entirely a testimony about the light of the Lord.

B. Walk as children of light

And so, if we are light in the Lord, we should walk as children of light. We should not just remember who we are, but we should live who we are. God has made us His own children.

I John 1, which we read before, says: *“This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

So, it’s not that as children of light, we do not sin. On the contrary, if we say we have no sin, we are self-deceived and do not possess the truth. But what we have is forgiveness and true fellowship – what we have is real cleansing and real light.

C. Bear the Fruit of Light

So, what does it mean to walk as children of light? Well, in part it means to bear the fruit of light in our lives. What is the fruit of light? Paul says it consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth.

1. **Goodness** is that which is good, is excellent, is praiseworthy. As Paul tells us in Philippians 4:8-9: *“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”* This is goodness, the fruit of light.
2. **Righteousness** is that which is just, upright. It has integrity, keeps its promises, upholds the right and punishes the wrong.
3. **Truth** is that which is true and certain, which is testable, provable, solid and reliable in any circumstance and in any area of life. Jesus said in John 14, “I am the truth” and in John 18, He said, *“For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.”*

In classic Hebrew imagery, light primarily signifies truth and righteousness, both of which have the idea of integrity, authenticity, fidelity, genuineness. In many ways, goodness is the natural result, the mature flowering of the fruit of righteousness and truth.

D. Discern what Pleases the Lord

As we walk as children of light, Paul says we will be able to prove or test or discern what pleases the Lord. This language here about discerning or proving what is pleasing to God is very similar to Romans 12:2: *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*

But why would we need to discern or prove or test to see what pleases God or what the will of God is? After all, doesn't the Bible tell us? Well, yes and no. We walk as children of light when we walk according to Scripture. Psalm 119:105: *“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”* We are transformed by the renewal of our minds by the Spirit's work through the word.

But the Bible doesn't tell us everything. It's not an encyclopedia of guidance for every life situation. We need to grow to discern, to prove what pleases God, what the will of God is, in various situations. We do this as we walk as children of light.

II. Expose the Darkness

A. Do Not Participate in Works of Darkness

But we cannot walk as children of light if we're participating in works of darkness. Notice that the light has fruit while the darkness has unfruitful works. This is consistent with the language of Galatians 5, which contrasts the fruit of the Spirit not with the fruit of the flesh, but with the works of the flesh. Nothing healthy or good grows in the dark, just rotten funk and poison. The flesh doesn't produce anything alive, just works. Dead works. Fruitless works.

We need to remember that because the grand conspiracy of the world, our flesh and the devil are always trying to convince us of the opposite: that life and joy and freedom are found in rebellion and selfishness and sin. But the truth is that sin leads to death, selfishness leads to misery, rebellion leads to isolation and loneliness, self-indulgence leads to guilt and shame. Nothing good ever comes from the unfruitful works of darkness; that's why they're unfruitful.

B. Expose the Works of Darkness

So, far from participating in the unfruitful works of darkness, we are called to expose them. The word for “expose” here has the root meaning of convict, to refute, to find fault with, to correct. It's unusual because it is directed here not toward people but toward acts, toward the fruitless works of darkness. You can't correct and refute works.

So, what does Paul mean by “exposing” the unfruitful works of darkness?

I. Not By Words, But By Deeds

Well, Paul likely doesn’t mean a verbal exposure of the works of darkness, since he says, “*For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret.*” – v. 12

2. By Being Light, Reveal the Dark

Rather than verbally exposing the works of darkness, it seems that Paul has in mind exposing them simply by being the light that we are in the Lord. “*But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light.*” – vv. 13-14

This is the challenge and this is the invitation: Not to denounce the horrible things people do in secret, but to live with such integrity, such honesty, such love and such grace-given righteousness that our lives are light in a dark world and they expose the works of darkness for what they are and show them for the ugly, dead, fruitless, lifeless things they truly are.

In the broader culture, Christians sadly have the opposite reputation, rightly or wrongly. In other words, we’re known more for condemnations of bad behavior in the world than we are for living lives of truth, goodness and righteousness. We’re known more for hypocrisy – condemning the sin in politicians and celebrities that we excuse and cover up in our own lives and in our churches.

The kind of exposure that Paul calls us to do is inherent in being children of light, in being light in the Lord. It is Christ-centered, Gospel-grounded, grace-empowered living for the Lord and His glory. Too often, when we are doing good works or speaking the truth, we’re doing so with the goal that people would look at us and think well of us. Instead, we need to earnestly desire that they would see Christ and think much of Him! He is the true Light of the World, and we are only light in Him.

After Paul calls us to expose the works of darkness by living as children of light, he closes with a quote that is as confusing and controversial as it is stirring and beautiful.

III. Wake Up

Therefore it says,

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

First of all, what exactly is Paul quoting here? Normally, when we see a quotation like this in the New Testament, we look to the Old Testament for the source, but it’s hard to do that here, because this doesn’t sound like a very accurate quote from any Old Testament verse. The closest ideas to this verse are in Isaiah:

*“Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise.
You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy!” – Isaiah 26:19*

*“Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.” – Isaiah 60:1*

*“Awake, awake,
put on your strength, O Zion;
put on your beautiful garments,
O Jerusalem, the holy city;” - Isaiah 52:1*

All three of these verses from Isaiah carry the same basic idea as this quotation, but none of them is really close in wording to the three-line verse from Paul. So, is Paul just making stuff up? No. The most likely source for this quote is from an early Christian hymn.

Just a few verses later, in verse 19, which we’ll look at next week, Paul says, “addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.” So, it’s likely that he’s doing here what he advises the Ephesians to do, addressing them in the language of a hymn. Now, the hymn itself was probably inspired by these passages in Isaiah.

If I were to say to you: “All of creation will receive the blessings of Christ’s redemption, just as it says, ‘He comes to make His blessings flow, far as the curse is found,’” you would know enough to know that I’m quoting from “Joy to the World.” But if someone read that hundreds of years from now, having no knowledge of that hymn, they might wonder what I was quoting, and they might say, “Oh, this is like Psalm 98:3, ‘All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.’” Well, similar idea but very different words, huh? They’d be wrong, but not wrong, because “Joy to the World” is based on Psalm 98.

So, what is the point of this Isaiah-based hymn fragment that Paul quotes here? It seems to be a picture of salvation, just as the verses from Isaiah seem to be pictures of salvation. Or perhaps

it's a picture of repentance and renewal among God's people, among believers. Or maybe it's both.

The format of this quoted verse is an invitation, to those who are asleep and those who are among the dead.

A. Wake Up!

“Awake, O Sleeper!” Whether this is an unbeliever or a believer who needs to be roused, the person is asleep in the light, missing out on the glory and joy of Christ. They need to wake up. Don't we all need to wake up sometimes? We can forget, grow complacent, settle down, compromise, stop caring, stop seeing, grow numb and fall asleep spiritually. At these times, we need to wake up! It's time to become spiritually aware and responsive.

B. Rise Up!

And once we wake up, we need to get up: “*arise from the dead.*” Whether this is a person who has been dead themselves or has just been sleeping among the dead, the point is the same: If you can wake up, then get up! Rise up!

If God gives us the grace to become aware of our spiritual slumber, our spiritual apathy, blindness and inactivity, then we need to respond and get up out of the place of the dead where we've been.

C. Shine with the Light of Christ!

And then the glory of Christ will shine upon us! And here's the wonderful news: When Christ shines upon us, He also shines through us, reflecting His light to others around us. This is what Paul is describing here: Nothing shakes us from our spiritual slumber and apathy better than seeing someone who is shining with the light of Christ, who is shining with the goodness, righteousness and truth of Christ, who is awake, alive and living in the light. God uses people like this to rouse us and lift us up, and then He causes Christ to so shine upon us that He uses us this way in the lives of others around us who are slumbering among the dead, dull to the light of Jesus.

Isn't it wonderful that God uses wakened sinners to rouse others to Himself? So, let's wake up, get up and watch Christ shine upon us!

