

Sermon Series: *The Book of Ephesians*



# Walk as Children of Light

How to Discern What is Pleasing to the Lord

**Ephesians 5:1-14 (ESV)**

**Reader: Amiee Williams**

<sup>1</sup> Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. <sup>2</sup> And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

<sup>3</sup> But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. <sup>4</sup> Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. <sup>7</sup>

*Therefore do not become partners with them;<sup>8</sup> for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light<sup>9</sup> (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true),<sup>10</sup> and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.<sup>11</sup> Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.<sup>12</sup> For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret.<sup>13</sup> But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible,<sup>14</sup> for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,*

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

## Introduction

There are few things in life which give a father more pleasure than when his children want to be like him and chose to imitate the positive aspects of his character. It is highly honoring of a father for his children to chose to live and act like him.

My dad was a pipe-fitter. When I was little I wanted to be a pipe-fitter just like him. I would wear the welder's hats, which he always wore, and often put on his giant boots and would try to walk like him. My mom caught me doing this one day when I was 2.

This picture was one of my father's favorite pictures of me, because in it I looked like him.

In the same way that we earthly fathers are pleased when our children act like us, so too our heavenly Father is pleased when his children act like him. This is what Paul is communicating to the Ephesians in chapters 4-6. This is the main point of the portion of Scripture Amiee just read a moment ago. If you want to please your heavenly Father, then act like him, live like him, and imitate him in all your conduct.



## Beginning with a Conclusion

The first two verses of chapter five are actually the conclusion of the final paragraph of chapter four<sup>1</sup> (vs.25-32), since the first word of verse 1 is 'therefore.' All of the behavioral commands Paul had given in that paragraph result in this two verse summary.

### **Ephesians 5:1-2 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> *Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.* <sup>2</sup> *And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter and verse numbering are not part of the original manuscripts. Dates for both?

Jesus is our ultimate example. And his sacrificial life and death are an illustration of what true love looks like. We are not to obey God as begrudging slaves who are commanded by a needy master. We are to obey God as beloved children who are imitating their heavenly Father.

Good parents never give commands intended to keep their children from joy. Good parents give commands in order to maximize joy in the lives of their children. If you hear these imperatives, which we find in 5:3-14, as the authoritarian commands of an over powerful tyrant who intends to steal all your fun, then you'll never obey the first one and you will have misunderstood the heart and intention of God.

However, if through them you understand God to be revealing the true nature of his holy character and see them as a means of his own self-disclosure and an expression of the actions and attitudes that please him *and which he will reward*<sup>2</sup>, then living an obedient life becomes an entirely different endeavor.

No one knew better the unblinking pleasure, unceasing blessing, and joyful communion<sup>3</sup> of God the Father than did Jesus. And no one lived a more holy and obedient life than did Jesus. Holiness and happiness are not opposites. The way to receiving and living within the soul-satisfying blessing and joyful communion of God the Father, is by living a holy and obedient life. Paul is not trying to rob us of our joy by giving these commands. He is trying to *maximize* our joy by giving these commands, for it is by keeping them that one can enjoy the life which God intends to bless.

The commands to holy living are not commands to dull living. They are commands that lead to enjoying pleasures unknown by people who are separated from God by sin. The call of these verses is a call to arise from the dead, dull, temporary pleasures that come from sinful disobedience and godless living and to awaken to the living, luminous, and lasting pleasures of righteous and godly living.

As we make our way through these verses you will be able to discern what is pleasing to the Lord and what is displeasing to him. You will see the actions and attitudes which he blesses as well as those which he will curse. You will also see that the contrast of these two ways of living are illustrated by the contrast of light and darkness.

The passage essentially breaks up into two sections, vs. 3-7 and vs. 8-14. The first section (vs. 3-7) is a call to avoid sexual immorality, all impurity, included that which is spoken, and concludes with a stern warning that these sins place one under God's wrath and will cause one to be excluded from God's eternal kingdom.

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<sup>2</sup> Heb 11:6.

<sup>3</sup> Heb 12:2.

The second section (vs.8-14) is “a sustained contrast between light and darkness.”<sup>4</sup> Paul reminds his readers of the dramatic transformation which has occurred in their lives. He reminds them of their true identity by virtue of their relationship with Jesus. He concludes by quoting what may be the lines of an early hymn or the combination of a couple of Old Testament (OT) passages.

## Part 1: Abstain from Immorality, Impurity, & Greed (vs. 3-7)

The first word of verse 3, is ‘**but.**’ It is a contrasting conjunction and this tells us that Paul is contrasting two ideas. Paul transitions his thinking from how the children of God *ought* to live—walking in love just like Jesus (v.2)—to how the children of God *ought not* to live—walking in false love, like the Gentiles who do not know God. His thinking moves from true love, which we see in the self-sacrificing lifestyle of Jesus, to false “love,” which we see in the self-indulgent lifestyle of sexual immorality and greed.

True love is self-sacrificing, not self-indulging. Ladies, don’t ever believe the line you will most assuredly hear at least once in your lifetime, “I love you. If you love me, then you’ll have sex with me now.” That is not love. It never has been and it never will be. All that is, is biology. Guys, don’t ever tell a lady you love her until you’re ready to marry her. You can say you love here when you’re ready lay down your life for her and commit yourself to her in marriage until you are parted by death. That’s true love. Anything else is a destructive and deceptive fairy tale.

### Ephesians 5:3-7 (ESV)

<sup>3</sup> But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. <sup>4</sup> Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. <sup>7</sup> Therefore do not become partners with them;

All forms of sexual immorality should be so far removed from the life of the child of God that it should not even be discussed. I like the way the NIV translates this verse.

### Ephesians 5:3 (NIV)

<sup>3</sup> But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people.

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<sup>4</sup> Peter Thomas O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 358.

The word here translated as 'sexual immorality' is the Greek word *porneia* (πορνεία). Our word pornography is derived from this word. The term refers to all sexual relations outside of marriage between husband and wife, including fornication (sex before marriage), adultery (sex outside of marriage), prostitution, and homosexual acts.<sup>5</sup> The only sexual relationship which God blesses is between husband and wife. This is the only sex which is pleasing in the sight of the Lord.

Sexual immorality, impurity, and greed (i.e. covetousness) all three have the same root; pleasing self. The aim of these desires is pleasing self while ignoring and dishonoring God. There is nothing more blameworthy than ignoring and dishonoring the God who created you. This is why Paul says that such sins "**must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.**"

### Application

If this is true, that we shouldn't even talk about such sins, then stop for a moment and think about what this says about the kind of movies and TV shows you watch. Go home and check your Netflix history and honestly evaluate it. Examine the movies and shows and see if you think Jesus would approve of what you are watching. Does your viewing habits please the Lord? Do those shows and movies glorify sexual immorality and impurity? Does your internet history included anything that even hints of sexual immorality, impurity, or greed?

Greed is not limited to money. Greed is "a selfish and excessive desire for more material possessions than is needed."<sup>6</sup> It might be money. It might be clothes. It might be cars. It could be anything. Within the secret chambers of your heart, is there any desire that yearns for more and more of something that exceeds basic necessity and has as it's aim the simple gratification of your own self-indulgence?

What kind of books do you read? If sexual immorality and greed should not even be named among the people of God, then certainly we should not devote time to watching or reading anything that glorifies the things which displease God.

### The Key Question

The central question implicit in what Paul is writing is this, whom do you wish most to please? Yourself or God?

In order to answer that question, just think for a moment about the content of your speech. What do you speak about most? The things that please God or the things that please you? It is the things that please us most which we speak most about. And so he writes,

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<sup>5</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 770.

<sup>6</sup> Frederick C. Mish, "Preface," *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003).

#### Ephesians 5:4 (ESV)

<sup>4</sup> *Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.*

This certainly hits home. Think back over this week. What was the content of your speech? Was there any **filthiness** in your speech? Any **foolish talk**? 'Foolish talk' is flippant, pointless chatter?<sup>7</sup> Any **crude joking**? What kind of jokes did you tell? What kind of jokes did you laugh at? Laughter encourages more whatever evokes it. How would your coworkers describe your speech? Filled with foolish, filthy, crudeness? Or filled with **thanksgiving**?

This, of course, includes whatever you post on FaceBook or Twitter. In our culture today, we have to add digital speech to the context of verbal speech. How would your family describe your language? Filled with crude jokes or filled with thanksgiving? Paul says let your speech be marked by thanksgiving, not filthy, foolish, crudeness.

Why is this so serious? Because Jesus said,

#### Matthew 12:34 (ESV)

<sup>34</sup> *For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.*

We can't help but talk about whatever fills our hearts.

#### Matthew 12:35-37 (ESV)

<sup>35</sup> *The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.* <sup>36</sup> *I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak,* <sup>37</sup> *for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."*

Evidently the reason we will either be condemned or justified based upon what we say is because our words are evidence of what we truly worship in the depths of our being. Our worship reveals that in which we find most pleasure. If you want an accurate picture of what you truly worship, all you need to do is record your conversation for a day or two and then listen to it. If you pay attention, you'll know exactly who or what you are worshiping.

We will be judged by what we worship. Paul wants us to be certain of this.

#### Ephesians 5:5-7 (ESV)

<sup>5</sup> *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.* <sup>6</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> A. Skevington Wood, "Ephesians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 68.

*Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, do not become partners with them;*

An idolater is a worshiper of something other than the Creator God. We worship most what we desire most and this is why Paul makes the connection between covetousness and idolatry. Some people worship sex more than God and some people worship themselves more than God. Some worship alcohol, money, power, influence, and many other things which we desire more than we desire God. This kind of idolatry will be judged.

Paul does not doubt that judgment will come. Judgment is certain. It will come and when it does, there will be many people who will be cut off from the kingdom of God. Who are those people? Those who will not inherit the kingdom of Christ and God are those who are sexually immoral, impure, and covetous. In other words, anyone whose life is dominated by a sexual immorality and greed will not be allowed entrance into heaven. And whoever worships sex or self will be excluded from heaven. Why? In heaven only God is worshiped. Those who only delight in worshiping sex or self would never be at home in such a place. And so they will be excluded from it.

**Let no one deceive you with empty words.** Those who worship sex, self, and satisfying their every greedy desire will find **the wrath of God upon them**. The wrath of God is real, not fiction. Therefore, Paul says, **"Do not become partners"** with people who are under the wrath of God. Paul is not saying to completely avoid them and have no interaction with them at all.<sup>8</sup> No. They need to know there is hope and through Jesus a way to escape the wrath of God. They need to know the gospel and they need to know we love them and care about them. Paul is saying don't make unbelievers your closest and best friends.

King Jehoshaphat made this mistake. He was a righteous king of Judah. He became partners with Ahab, the unrighteous king of Israel. Jehoshaphat gave his daughter in marriage to Ahab's son. Because of this partnership, Jehoshaphat entered into war as Ahab's ally. When he came home wounded from the battle, the Lord said to him,

**2 Chronicles 19:2 (ESV)**

*<sup>2</sup> "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? Because of this, wrath has gone out against you from the Lord."*

A child of God should not love someone who hates her heavenly Father. Never enter into a defined partnership or a deep friendship with an unbeliever. Never marry an unbeliever. Don't date an unbeliever. Don't enter into a business partnership with an unbeliever. There will be no peace among people who possess two different sets of values and loyalties. Never join hands with someone who is under God's wrath. If you want to enjoy the pleasure of God's blessing, then never align yourself with someone who abides under God's curse. If you want to

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<sup>8</sup> See 1 Cor 5:10 where Paul explains something very similar.

please your heavenly Father, then do not become close friends or partners with someone who cares nothing about pleasing God. You cannot please both.

If you're already in such a relationship, then you need to acknowledge the mistake before the Lord and seek his help for how to handle it rightly. If you're already married to an unbeliever, then don't seek a divorce. Earnestly pray for the strength to remain faithful to the Lord and ask him to reveal himself to your spouse through you as you live out your faith before him or her. You'll need other believers to walk with you through this and join you in prayer. Don't try to do this alone.

If you're in business partnership then you should first ensure that you're not obligated to do anything unethical or contrary to God's revealed will. You should ask yourself, "Has this partnership ever caused you to do anything which you knew would be displeasing to God the Father." If you find yourself being led into behaviors and choices which you know God will not bless, then consider getting out of the partnership.

#### 2 Corinthians 6:14 (ESV)

*<sup>14</sup> Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?*

Paul wants his readers to remember that a massive transformation has taken place in their lives. Once they were children of darkness, but now they are children of light. Everything changes when you begin to walk with Jesus.

## Part 2: From Darkness to Light (vs.8-14)

#### Ephesians 5:8-14 (ESV)

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

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

Paul describes life before believing in Jesus as **darkness**. But after believing in Jesus Paul teaches, "**Now you are light.**" This is who you are if you are in Christ. Jesus transforms those who believe in him. This is our vision for this church. We yearn to be a place of transformation. We yearn to be a place where those who are in darkness can experience the person of Jesus



and be transformed into people of light; transformed into beloved children of God the Father through faith in Jesus, the Son.

You once were darkness, but now you are light. You are no longer darkness, so you can no longer live in darkness. Since you are light you must **walk as children of light**. This is what is pleasing to the Lord. When we live like him and act like him, then he is pleased with us.

What does walking in the light look like?

**Ephesians 5:9-10 (ESV)**

*<sup>9</sup> (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), <sup>10</sup> and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.*

Walking in the light means embracing all that is **good and right and true**. That means rejecting and turning away from all that is bad and wrong and false. Or another way of thinking of it is asking yourself "**What is pleasing to the Lord?**"

How you decide what is pleasing to the Lord is by knowing his word. You don't decide what is pleasing to the Lord by what is pleasing to you, because "*the LORD does not see as man sees*"<sup>9</sup> and "*his ways are not like our ways, and his thoughts are not like our thoughts.*"<sup>10</sup> His ways and his thoughts are much higher and purer than our ways and our thoughts.

What pleases the LORD is everything that is good and right and true according to *his* definition of those words and not ours. Paul puts this way,

**Philippians 4:8 (ESV)**

*<sup>8</sup> 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.*

These are the things that please the Lord. Whenever you are trying to discern what pleases the Lord, ask yourself, "Is this good or right or true?" And when you are trying to decide what is good or right or true, ask yourself, "Is this pleasing to what I know of the Lord from his revealed word?"

Paul offers some further clarity on what is pleasing to the Lord and he circles us back around to our speech.

**Ephesians 5:11-12 (ESV)**

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<sup>9</sup> 1 Sam 16:7.

<sup>10</sup> Is 55:8-9.

<sup>11</sup> *Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.* <sup>12</sup> *For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret.*

God is pleased when you **avoid participating in the unfruitful works of darkness**, but he is also pleased when we **expose** those unfruitful works for the sin that they truly are. God is pleased when we his children do not allow the deceptive lies of sin to remain concealed. Sin always masquerades as the good, but when we expose it for all of the evil and the death that results, then God is pleased because the truth is being told.

For example, when abortion providers consistently refer to the baby in the womb as a fetus, the destruction of that little life can more easily be referred to as a “surgical procedure” rather than what it truly is, the murder of an unborn human child.

We can refer to the sin of adultery as an “affair,” or we can refer to it as the Bible does by saying that the adulterer is a “robber who increases traitors among mankind” (Prov 23:28).

We can refer to divorce as a “mutual parting of ways,” or we can refer to it as the Bible does as something the LORD hates<sup>11</sup> and the man who commits it is like a “hard hearted,”<sup>12</sup> “faithless man who “covers himself with a robe of violence.”<sup>13</sup>

We could refer to a man with a hot temper and cruel tongue as an man with an “expressive personality,” or we could refer to him as the Bible does, like a “city without walls”<sup>14</sup> and man whose “words are like sword thrusts.”<sup>15</sup>

If these examples sting a bit, then that’s good because walking out of darkness into light always hurts a bit, but being in the light is much better than being in the dark. Learning the truth about a situation is always better than believing a lie.

“Awake, O sleeper.”

God would not have us remain spiritually asleep. Some of us are still asleep to the things of God. It’s time to wake up. It’s time to stop acting like little children who are faking being asleep so we can keep playing with our pet sins.

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

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<sup>11</sup> Dt 24:1-4.

<sup>12</sup> Mt 19:8.

<sup>13</sup> Mal 2:16.

<sup>14</sup> Prov 25:28.

<sup>15</sup> Prov 12:18.

Once we were darkness but now we are light.

It's time to put away all darkness and let Christ shine into our lives. It's time to put our faith in Jesus and stop trusting in ourselves. It's time to trust in the righteousness of Jesus and stop trusting in our own perceived righteousness.

It's time to stop playing with sexual immorality and impurity. It's time to put away all greed. It's time to stop the filthy language and the foolish talk. It's time to fill our mouths with thanksgiving. It's time to stop telling and laughing at crude jokes. These things do not please our heavenly Father. It's time to stop pleasing our sinful nature and start pleasing our loving Savior.

It's time to put off the old man and put on the new man. It's time to happily put on our Father's happy hat of holiness and step into the boots of our heavenly Father and walk like children of light.

It's time to run from the darkness and walk in the light.