

Following Jesus in the 21st Century

Study Guide

Session 2 – Our Spiritual Alarm

Key Passage: Ephesians 5:1–18

Introduction

Every generation of believers faces unique challenges, but every generation faces the same essential question:

Are we truly following Jesus?

As the church approaches nearly two thousand years since the earthly ministry of Christ, believers must guard against becoming spiritually comfortable, culturally influenced, or merely religious. Scripture repeatedly warns that it is possible to believe the wrong thing, deceive ourselves, or drift away from the truth without realizing it.

This study is not intended to produce fear or uncertainty. Rather, its purpose is to strengthen genuine faith through honest biblical examination. God never asks His children to ignore the condition of their hearts. Instead, He continually calls us into His light, where truth produces assurance, transformation, and deeper fellowship with Him.

Main Truth

Truth never fears examination.

Biblical faith is never threatened by honest evaluation because genuine faith is founded upon Jesus Christ and His Word.

The Danger of False Assurance

Proverbs 14:12

"There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death."

Not everything that feels right is actually right.

Culture...

Tradition...

Personal experience...

Religious activity...

None of these are sufficient foundations for salvation.

Truth must always be measured by God's revealed Word.

Discussion

- Why can sincere people still be sincerely wrong?
 - What sources besides Scripture often influence our beliefs?
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Matthew 24:4

"See to it that no one misleads you."

One of Jesus' first warnings concerning the last days was deception.

Notice:

Jesus did not simply warn about persecution.

He warned about deception.

The greatest danger to many believers is not open opposition to Christianity—but subtle distortion of biblical truth.

Reflection

How can believers protect themselves from spiritual deception?

James 1:22

"Prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves."

Knowledge alone never transforms.

Information without obedience produces self-deception.

A growing disciple moves beyond hearing Scripture into living Scripture.

Ask Yourself

Where has God clearly spoken into my life that still requires obedience?

John 5:39–40

Jesus told the religious leaders:

"You search the Scriptures...and it is these that testify about Me."

These men knew Scripture remarkably well.

Yet they completely missed the One to whom Scripture pointed.

The purpose of Scripture is not merely to know the Bible.

The purpose of Scripture is to know Christ.

Important Principle

The Bible is never an end in itself.

It is God's revelation leading us into relationship with Jesus Christ.

The Biblical Call to Self-Examination

Scripture consistently calls believers to evaluate themselves.

Not to create insecurity...

But to strengthen assurance.

2 Peter 1:10

"Be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you..."

Peter encourages believers to confirm the reality of their faith through continual spiritual growth.

Faith produces fruit.

2 Corinthians 13:5

"Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith."

Paul assumes that honest examination is healthy.

Faith welcomes examination because Christ is its foundation.

Matthew 7:16

"You will know them by their fruits."

Jesus consistently taught that genuine faith produces visible evidence.

Fruit never earns salvation.

Fruit reveals salvation.

Galatians 5:22–23

The fruit of the Spirit includes:

- Love
- Joy
- Peace
- Patience
- Kindness
- Goodness
- Faithfulness
- Gentleness
- Self-control

These qualities are not manufactured through human effort.

They are produced through the Holy Spirit's work within believers.

Reflection

Which fruit of the Spirit has God been developing most in your life?

Which needs greater growth?

Truth Welcomes the Light

John 3:21

"He who practices the truth comes to the Light..."

Truth never hides.

Darkness avoids exposure.

But those who genuinely belong to Christ desire God's light to reveal both strengths and weaknesses.

Conviction is not condemnation.

It is evidence that God is actively working in His children.

The Challenge Facing the Modern Church

Nearly two thousand years have passed since Christ walked among His disciples.

Throughout history the church has experienced:

- Heresies
- False teaching
- Division
- Cultural compromise
- Spiritual drift

Every generation must intentionally return to God's Word.

Hebrews 2:1–3

"We must pay much closer attention...so that we do not drift away."

Notice:

People rarely abandon Christ suddenly.

Most drift gradually.

Drift happens quietly.

Neglect becomes compromise.

Compromise becomes spiritual distance.

Discussion

What are some practical ways Christians today may slowly drift from Christ?

A Spiritual Alarm

Read Together

Ephesians 5:1–18

This passage functions like a spiritual alarm clock.

Paul calls believers to wake up and live differently.

Notice the repeated commands:

Walk in Love

God's love is demonstrated through Christ.

Followers of Jesus imitate that love.

Reject Sin

Paul specifically addresses:

- Sexual immorality
- Impurity
- Greed
- Corrupt speech
- Foolish talk

These are not merely behaviors.

They reveal the direction of the heart.

Refuse Deception

Verse 6 warns:

"Let no one deceive you with empty words."

False teaching often minimizes sin.

God never does.

Walk as Children of Light

Believers are no longer identified by darkness.

Our lives should increasingly reflect:

- Goodness
 - Righteousness
 - Truth
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Expose Darkness

Paul says believers are not to participate in darkness.

Instead, they are called to shine light upon it through holy living.

Light does not argue with darkness.

Light simply shines.

Live Wisely

Paul concludes by urging believers to:

- Walk carefully
- Redeem the time
- Understand God's will
- Be continually filled with the Holy Spirit

Following Jesus requires intentional living.

A Call to Repentance

James 4:4

Friendship with the world places us in opposition to God.

The issue is not loving people.

The issue is adopting the world's values above God's truth.

James 4:7–10

Notice the progression:

- Submit to God.
- Resist the devil.
- Draw near to God.
- Cleanse your hands.
- Purify your heart.
- Humble yourself before the Lord.

Repentance is not merely feeling sorry.

Repentance is turning toward God.

God promises:

"He will exalt you."

Personal Reflection

Take time this week to prayerfully consider these questions.

1. Am I building my faith upon God's truth or upon personal assumptions?
2. Is my knowledge of Scripture producing transformation?
3. What fruit of the Spirit is becoming increasingly evident in my life?
4. Have I slowly drifted in any area of my walk with Christ?
5. Is there any area where God is calling me to repentance?
6. Am I living as a child of light?
7. What practical step of obedience is God asking me to take this week?

Memory Verses

Hebrews 2:1

"For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it."

John 3:21

"But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."

Closing Thought

The purpose of spiritual examination is never to weaken faith but to strengthen it. God calls His people into the light, not to shame them, but to assure them, transform them, and conform them to the image of His Son. The alarm is sounding—not to produce fear, but to awaken the church to wholehearted devotion, renewed repentance, and faithful obedience. As followers of Jesus in the 21st century, may we respond by drawing near to God, walking in His light, and living each day filled with His Spirit.