



Ge In The Light

Ephesians 5:1-14

Grace Church | 1.30.22

Every Christian, even if they came to faith at an early age, has a period (or periods) in their life when they begin to really recognize that they have moved, as Ephesians 2 says, from death to life. Perhaps this immediately after a conversion experience, where the world seems suddenly charged with new possibility, freedom, and joy. For others, it may come later—a sudden breakthrough in maturity or understanding—a moment of gospel clarity, of spiritual wakefulness, when the pieces fall into place. Some of you may have yet to experience this, and to you faith is necessary, helpful, engrained, but at times you feel maybe you are not quite there. For others, you may be experiencing that feeling now. For most, I would say we look back on those times in life with a sense of thankfulness, but perhaps longing for what was. Everyone wants their soul to feel alive again.

You might call this, as some have, a longing for personal revival. It's when the things of God seem to move from black and white to color. It can happen quickly. Jonathan Edwards, the American theologian who spurred the First Great Awakening, which is known as a period where spiritual revival or renewal such as I am describing happening on a societal level, defended what he saw in 18th century New England as a true revival by assuring that is possessed the following five characteristics:

1. True revival exalts Christ, not man or his emotions.
2. True revival increases concern and estimation of the Bible.
3. True revival convinces people of the truth of God's word and of sound doctrine.
4. True revival produces a genuine love for God and others.
5. True revival leads to repentance and works against the darkness of sin.¹

If Edwards is right, and revival or spiritual awakening is marked by these characteristics, then you might say that Ephesians is a book about spiritual revival, renewal, or awakening—a remark we have already made as we teach through this book. It seems Paul's aim is to lay the foundation for the church in Ephesus for a spiritually alive congregation. So he gives them in chapters 1-3 a glorious exaltation of Christ. Likewise he draws their attention to the mysteries revealed in God's word, his great promises and truth. He teaches sound doctrine, truth about their spiritual state before Christ and their future in Christ. And he ends chapters 1-3 with a prayer for what? For

¹ Summarized from Jonathan Edwards, *The Distinguishing Marks of the Work of the Spirit of God*



spiritual renewal, that the Ephesians would know the love of God that surpasses knowledge. So it makes sense, then, that the expectation is that the last piece of this puzzle is true, genuine, repentance. Not just a change of mind and heart, but a change of life. It's this piece of the spiritual awakening puzzle we continue to fit together in chapter 5. When you become truly gripped with the love of God in Christ, you will kill sin and pursue holiness. Full stop.

But the question for us today is simple: what about when I am not feeling or experiencing personal revival? What do I do when my mind, my heart, does *not* feel alive to God? It's easy to pursue holiness when I am spiritually energized, but what about when I am spiritually exhausted? Am I doomed to wallow in sensuality, impurity, and selfish idolatry?

The answer is obviously: no. Spiritual renewal is not just for times of corporate revival. Holiness is not a seasonal attitude. Here is how we put off sinful desire and walk worthy of our calling in Christ when we don't feel spiritually alive: we get into the light. That's Paul's great encouragement in Ephesians 5:1-14. We see it **verse 8**, when he says "walk as Children of light" and in **verse 11**, "take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them."

Recently pastor Ray Ortlund encouraged pastors to spend 2022 reminding their congregations that the Christian life is far less "you should," and far more "we can."² In other words: holiness is not about guilting each other into what we should be doing, but encouraging each other that the gospel frees us to what we can be doing. So let me say this again: daily spiritual renewal is possible, regardless of what your feeling about your spiritual state now. It is possible for the spiritually exhausted, for the wanderers, for the sufferers. Why? Because God in Christ, by the Spirit, has made you new. So you can experience daily spiritual renewal. How? By getting sin into the light.

So this morning I have three points about darkness. Darkness is shorthand for impurity, sensuality, sexual immorality, covetousness, being greedy for sin. It's darkness, all of it. It clouds our minds, petrifies our hearts. And we've got to really really figure it out. We've got to get down deep into the ins and outs of what this whole darkness thing is, so that we can *expose* it, and get into the light. My three points: 1) the insanity of darkness; 2) the consequence of darkness; and 3) the death of darkness.

The Insanity of Darkness (1-4).

Look first at **verse 1**. The word "therefore" obviously connects us back to the end of chapter 4. Here Paul's admonition is towards kindness and forgiveness, for the simple fact that God has been kind to us and forgiven us in Christ. How could we not forgive much, when we have been forgiven much? So the argument is similar in **1-2**. Because you are God's children—adopted, brought in, given the family name and the family trust fund—act like God. No, you can't be God, but here is a way you can model him. Walk in love, because he is love.

² <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/ray-ortlund/should-or-can-in-2022/>



Love is the great end of the Christian life. It's the goal of all things. Heaven will be a world of love. And here we see, sacrificial love pleases God. It's worship, music in his ear, fragrance in his nostrils. There is no greater example of love than the sacrifice of Christ for us. As the ancient preacher John Chrysostom said: 'you spare friends. He spared enemies'.³ What greater love is this, to love those who hate you, to call friends those who deny you? This is the standard: God-like love. It's because of his great love that we are his children. We have been made children of love, re-born with spiritual DNA. So that's your identity: child of God. If God is love, and your identity is found in him in Christ, then you too are made of love and for love.

If that is true, then what Paul says in **verse 3** makes sense. All of this impurity is *improper* for children of love. Sexual immorality is the word *pornea*, which we get our word pornography from. In a nutshell, it is any act of sexual desire that violates God's standard of holiness. It's sexual desire that is not pointed rightly towards a spouse in covenant marriage. But there is a reason this is linked with impurity and covetousness. See, sexual immorality is not just a "no-no", as if Christians are "anti-sex" and God's desire for sexuality is to heap up so many rules and regulations that it becomes undesirable except for when you need to have a baby. Sexual immorality is not proper for children of love, for saints, not just because God said "no", but because it's impure. Giving ourselves over to sexual desire, and by this I mean fantasizing or acting sexually in a way that is not bound by covenant marriage, is not only wrong, it's diluted! That is what impurity is: it's taking what is best, what is gold, what is priceless, and making it cheap, easy, and unsatisfying.

Sexual sin is just like covetousness, that is why it is mentioned. It's traditionally interpreted as "avarice" a word we don't use often. The implication is that what Paul has in mind here is not just coveting what someone else has, but also greedily desiring *all things*. Another way to describe this is simple: lust. Lust is the great enemy of love. It wants what it wants, and it wants it now. Lust cheapens love, it's a shallow imitation of it, an imperfect, diluted love. This is the great darkness of a sexual sin like pornography: not only does it break God's law, it cheapens his grace for those watching, for their spouses, and for those involved in the making of pornography. Giving ourselves to pornography, but also to any sexual fantasy or immorality, contributes to the making of a world without love. It exchanges the glories of sexual intimacy created by God for oppression and injustice. It trades respect for rape, covenant for instant gratification, beautiful delight for objectification, and it creates a world where men and women forget their status as children of God's love and become instead slaves to lust.

This is not to mention the impurity of adultery, which trades the love of trust for the lust of discontentment, or the impurity of divorce, which trades the love of steadfastness for the lust of personal freedom. And Paul even takes it a step further in **verse 4**. Not only is it our actions that can be impure, but our words too. Crude talk may seem innocent, but in reality it is the doorway for lust, it's the opening up of the heart towards impurity, it's letting impure words to rest on our tongues and minds before they rest in our hearts. On and on we can go, but the idea is simple: all of this is darkness. And here is what you must hear: it is pure insanity.

³ Quoted in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*



You are not crazy. Life is difficult. Impurity circles around us constantly, it pervades our culture like the water we swim in. It's nearly unavoidable. But you are not crazy to make it a big deal. You are not crazy to stop watching tv shows and movies that dilute your love for God and others. You are not crazy to want to smash your smartphone into a million pieces when the ads it feeds you draw you like a beacon into lust and pornography. What is crazy is to think that as children of the loving God of the universe, we can put up with sexual immorality and impurity and crudeness. What is crazy is to think that any of that darkness could ever be proper for the people of God.

Listen to me very closely. You may be stuck fast in sexual sin, in pornography, or premarital sex, or simply overcome with lust. But if you are a child of God, impurity is not your identity. Lust is not the name on your birth certificate. You are a beloved child of God. So I am not going to give you and "you should's". You all know what you should be going. Rather, let me say this. You can wake up today to the insanity of impurity. You can wake up, you can take a long hard look at your identity in Christ, and a long hard look at the filthiness of the darkness, and you can say: why in the world would I ever trade the purity of God's triune love for the lust of a moment? God is with you, son and daughter of the king. Walking in darkness is insanity—but you don't have to be tricked anymore. Instead, look at **verse 4**. You can trade what is filthy for a heart of thanksgiving for what is pure. What is purer than the blood of Christ? It has been shed for you. Next time you are tempted to believe the insanity of sin, give thanks instead, for Jesus Christ and him crucified.

The Future of Darkness (5-6).

This point will actually be very brief, since it is briefer in the text. In **verse 5**, Paul actually moves beyond exhortation into motivation. After showing the insanity of darkness and impurity, he wants us to have some ammo for identifying why it is so silly to trade love for lust. And he does so by pointing to the future. Everyday we are being tempting to partake in impurity, and not just sexually. Our impurity, our lust and covetousness, greed for sin, is actually described by Paul as "idolatry" in this same text. So none of us are off the hook, because we all make idols. We all have those areas of life—possessions, relationships, status, dreams—that we value more than the glory of God. The things we would die if we lost are the very things we worship.

So every day we are being tempted with impurity and idolatry, but here is what the tempter leaves out. He seems convincing because he only points to temporary, present benefits of sin. But never does Satan remind us of the future of sin. So that's Paul's strategy in **verse 5-6**. Instead of being deceived by empty promises, we must be sober-minded and clear-headed about the consequences of sin. God's wrath against sin is not his uncontrolled anger. God is not overcome with passions, he is not controlled by anyone or anything or any feeling. Rather, God's wrath is his right and perfect and appropriate response to impurity. He wants to give you the undiluted perfections of himself in a perfect world forever! His wrath then is good news—it means he is not satisfied with second best, with 98% percent purity. You can say no to the lies of sin when you know that sin has an expiration date.



Let me clear something up here though. When Paul speaks of “everyone who is sexually immoral or impure”, he is issuing a warning to the gathered church in Ephesus, but he has in mind those hearing who are not truly children of God. He is saying: “there are some among us who pretend to be children of love, but are really just full of lust. They currently have no inheritance in the kingdom of God. They are not in Christ, but they may be among those in Christ.” So this is a real warning: it is not a warning that you can *lose* your inheritance. Already in Ephesians we have seen how that inheritance is sealed by God’s very own Spirit! If you are a child of God, you are always a child of God. When you give into sexual immorality and impurity and idolatry, you are not acting from your identity, but in spite of your identity. That is Paul’s whole point here: why would you act impure when you have been made pure? It’s out of place. But if you are not a child of God, then impurity is not out of place. It makes sense. Your life is given to futility, so why not act in whatever way satisfies you now?

Last Sunday in our Biblical technology class we were tasked with picking a random text and determining if we could see it’s link to the gospel. One of our table mates turned to 2 Chronicles 21, where we read the tragedy of King Jehoram of Judah. Jehoram was an evil wicked king: he led the people into idolatry. So in his justice, God made an example of him and caused a sickness of the stomach to come over him. The text literally says that his bowels came out because of the disease, and he died in great agony. After his death, his inheritance was taken. The people so loathed him that they refused to bury him in the tomb of kings with the rest of their previous rulers. What is the point of such a story in the Biblical text? To show us the good news that God does not let sin go unpunished. Sin never wins in the end. Wickedness does not lead to inheritance. Jerhoam is an anti-Christ, for going his way leads to no inheritance in the kingdom, but going the way of Christ leads to all of heaven’s riches.

So here then is a charge in light of this warning: **Examine yourself.** Do you love sin, or do you hate it? Are you greedy for it, or are you greedy to get rid of it? If you answered negatively, that you hate darkness and are ready to be done with it, then that is a sign you have been remade with new desires. Take heart, God is preparing you for your inheritance to come. Let this warning encourage you: you used to be bound for wrath, now you are bound for blessing. You know the future of darkness. It’s not worth it, and you can say no to it’s lies, you don’t have to listen to deceit. In the Ephesians day, the gnostics said that you can be spiritually alive and still do whatever you’d like with your body. The cult of Artemis in Ephesus was always calling the citizens to participate in it’s sexual rituals and orgies. But it’s all a lie! If someone tells you that you can follow Christ and not care about your holiness, you don’t have to believe them anymore.

But if all your desires are still for immorality, for impurity, and for idols? Come now, today, to Christ Jesus for grace. His arms are open to receive you. There is no end to your road now that does not lead to futility and spiritual poverty. But the narrow way of Christ is full of the inheritance of God himself.



The Death of Darkness (7-14)

We end now with the true meat of the passage. How do we walk in spiritual renewal and holiness? We get into the light. Once again, the text points us to what we are in Christ, not what we are not. **Verse 7**, don't *partner* with darkness, don't pretend you can act in whatever way you would like when you've been made a child of God's love. Why? Because, **verse 8**, you used to be darkness, but now you are light. Notice Paul doesn't say: "now you *have* light" but rather you *are* light.

Light and darkness is a prominent Biblical theme. What are the first words of God recorded in Scripture? *Let there be light*. And again in **Genesis 1:14**, when God is creating the stars to give light, the goal of the light is to "separate the darkness". Meaning the stars and sun and moon are there to give us a contrast. We know what darkness is, because we have seen the light. They could not be more opposite. That word for "lights" is more like "luminaries", those who shine. Now, when Jesus Christ comes into the world, one of the clear titles he gives himself is similar. He says "I am the light of the world", the chief luminary, who came to earth to dispel darkness. As John says, "In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." So when the chief and true light of life comes, giving his Spirit to his people he confesses "you are the light of the world". The church, following Christ, is the place where light and darkness is divided, where we can see clearly what is life and what is death, what is pure and what is impure. We are meant to be luminaries, displaying the light of Christ and illuminating and exposing, dividing the darkness of the world. We do not "become light by taking up deeds of light. [We] are light in union with Christ."⁴

There is two realities that come into focus if we truly believe that we are luminaries of God in Christ. **First, we walk in the light**. This is the logical implication in **verse 8-9**. Because we are light, we walk like it. We find our home in the light. What is the light? Paul tells us: it's what is good and right and true. It's the opposite of impurity, it's purity. What is light? It's good, because it's satisfying and beautiful; it's right because it's straight and just; and it's true because it's sincere and never deceiving. Ultimately, light is found in God. Before he said "let there be light", there was only him. He is goodness, he is righteous, he is truth. Walking in the light, then, is simply opening ourselves up to God. It's exposing ourselves. It's the process of waking up every day and saying: "I will live today before the face of God. He will be my satisfaction, he will be my standard, he will be my source of strength, and his glory will be my goal." Walking in the light may be summed up in **verse 10**: discerning what is pleasing to the Lord.

What is pleasing to the Lord? Well we already have answered that question in **verse 2**. Sacrificial love is pleasing to the lord. Pure, Christ-like love is the fragrant aroma he desires. Walking in the light is pretty simple, really. It's being so overwhelmed with the pure love of God in Christ that we don't settle for impurity. Walking in the light is taking delight in what is pure: it's not settling for an hour of screen time when an hour of laughter with your children is available. It's not settling for

⁴ S. M. Baugh, *Ephesians*, 429.



bitterness when patience is much more enjoyable. It's not settling for lust when love delights the senses immeasurably more.

If we truly believe that we are luminaries of God in Christ, first we walk in the light. **Second, we expose darkness.** See **verses 11-14.** The works of darkness are barren, like dry trees. We must learn to cry out in the street and raise our voice loudly and boldly and say: "lust is not worth it." We must band together to preach against the work of Satan. We must be unafraid in a fearful world to expose the dehumaness of our world, which teaches us that we are defined by our sexuality, that we are worthless if we cannot express our individuality, and that we cannot belong if we fail to meet a standard of productivity. You do not have to go along with works of darkness, avoiding them here and there. No, don't go to Twitter or Facebook to air your grievances. Instead, go first to your own life. Expose your own darkness—confess you sin so that you may be healed. Confess to a brother, to a sister, truly, clearly, without qualification. Let them pray for you.

One way that we want to expose darkness this semester is by offering a class, starting March 20, for men and women, to wake up from sexual insanity. We are calling it "The Death of Darkness". Darkness dies when it is exposed to the light. In the class, as a whole church, we will be talking about purity, sexuality, putting pornography to death, healing from past sexual sin done against us, and working together to expose darkness and sexual immorality as a church. We won't stay silent. We won't take the easy path, we must expose darkness.

We must expose darkness, because when we do, it becomes an opportunity for light. When you shine light into a dark room, what happens? The darkness becomes visible. The darkness flees, the light always wins. So this is what Paul means in **verse 13.** When we walk in the light and expose darkness, we aren't just killing sin. We are paving the way for holiness. Look at this quotation Paul pulls in **verse 14,** likely a summary from Biblical material or perhaps an ancient Christian hymn:

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

I love this. What is the secret to holiness? Get in the light. When you get in the light, you will expose the darkness. And how do you get in the light? You have to get up from the dead. As Christians, we know a thing or two about getting up from the dead. We know that there was only ever one man who got up from the dead by his own power. We know that that tomb we laid in was very dark, but he exposed it. We know that if we are going to rise up and awake from the dead, we need the power of the resurrected Christ. Here is good news: he is risen, and all those in him have already woken up too. What is the secret to holiness? There is no secret. But there is a way for holiness to be guaranteed. Have the holy one shine on you. And that is exactly what Jesus Christ has done. Take heart, Christian. Whether your soul feels revived or not, Christ is shining on you. Day by day, you are closer to his pure light of love. He said: "In this world you will have troubles. But take heart, I have overcome the world." The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.



