

Week 10: *Children of the Light: Ephesians 5:1–20*

Hook



Main Point: Living as children of the light means living in purity and exposing darkness.

Q: Were you were afraid of the dark as a child?

Q: Have you battled a fear of the dark as an adult?

According to a recent survey of 2,000 Americans, nearly 3 in 10 adults (29 percent) admit they're still afraid of the dark. One in four sleeps with a nightlight, 10 percent sleeps with the lights on, and about one in 10 still sleeps with a stuffed animal or another comfort item.¹

Q: Why do you think so many adults are still uncomfortable in the dark?

Darkness isn't usually what hurts us. The danger is that darkness hides what's really there. You can't see the obstacles, the cliff, the snake or the person standing in the shadows. The Bible repeatedly uses darkness as a picture of life apart from God. In Ephesians 5, Paul reminds believers that we are no longer people of darkness – we are children of the light. God's light doesn't just comfort us; it reveals truth, exposes danger, and shows us how to walk.

RECAP: In the first half of the letter to the Ephesians (chapters 1–3), Paul gave us doctrine: how the Gospel transforms us into new creations in Christ. In the second half, he described how to apply that doctrine to our lives, how to live as transformed people in the church community (4:1–5:21), in the home (5:22–6:9), and in the world (6:10–20).

In the last lesson, Paul used the metaphor of “taking off” the old self and “putting on” the new self to describe the way Christians live into their new identity in Christ. This lesson uses the imagery of light and darkness to talk about the way believers live as God's people and shine His light in the world.

This lesson will continue to talk about living into our new identity by imitating Christ – living in sacrificial love, exposing darkness and walking in the light, living wisely and being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Week 10: Children of the Light: Ephesians 5:1–20

Book

Main Point: Living as children of the light means living in purity and exposing darkness.

Ephesians 5:1–10 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Children of the light live in purity, not immorality.

Q: How is walking in love connected to purity in our actions, words and thoughts?

Q: What did Paul tell us about those who practice impurity?

Q: What are some things that can slowly become ‘normal’ in our culture that we know shouldn’t become normal in the life of a follower of Jesus?

Again, Paul started this section with “therefore,” tying this section to what he had just told us – how to put aside the old self and live together as our new selves in Christian community. Living in this way is being “imitators of God” as His beloved children, because children naturally imitate what their parents do (5:1). It means walking in sacrificial love as Christ loved us (5:2). This section continues the same discussion of living in our new identity, but with a new metaphor – being children of light. Paul used the “sons” of God imagery earlier (1:5) and prayed for the Ephesians’ hearts to be “enlightened,” (1:18) and now he was adding them together.

There is a lot of imagery of light in the Bible. God’s Word is a light unto our path (Psalm 119:105). The Lord is our light and salvation (Psalm 27:1). God’s people were called to be a light to the nations (Isaiah 49:6). Jesus said both that He is the Light of the World (John 8:12) and that His disciples are the light of the world (Matthew 5:14–16). If God is light and we are children of God, then we are children of light. But God is like the sun and we are like the moon; we don’t have our own light; we reflect His light to the world. The imagery of light tells us a lot of things about God:

- **Light brings life.** Sunlight is the ultimate energy source for nearly all life (John 1:4).
- **Light enables us to see** so we can know the dangers around us (Ephesians 5:13).
- **Light guides us.** Flashlights or headlights lead us on our way (John 8:12).
- **Light is pure** and radiant (1 John 1:5), beautiful and glorious (2 Corinthians 4:6).
- **Light is powerful.** Even one small candle overtakes the darkness (1 John 4:4).

We cannot be light in exactly the same way God is light. He is the source; we are the reflection. But because Christ has brought us out of darkness and made us “children of light,” our lives should reflect His character to the world. In this passage, Paul concentrates especially on the purity of light. John wrote that “God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). There is no evil in God at all, evil does not come from God (James 1:13–14). Paul wrote that there should not be even a hint of

immorality among us (5:3). Let it not even be named among us. We should be so pure that people wouldn't even consider accusing us of immorality. Of course it is impossible for us to be perfect; we will always fall short. But it's the ideal Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount when He taught what it looks like to be kingdom people – "be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

This passage shows that purity involves more than sexual conduct; it also reaches our desires and our speech. Such sins are inconsistent with the lives of God's holy people and have no place among them. Paul pointed ahead to heaven to tell us *why* these things don't belong in the Church, among God's people (5:5). In God's final kingdom, there will be no evil nor any effects of evil – no death, mourning, crying or pain (Revelation 21:4). In the New Jerusalem, God's glory will provide its light, and there will be no night there (Revelation 21:23–25; 22:5). More broadly, God's final kingdom will be completely free from the darkness of sin and evil. The Church, walking in God's ways and loving one another the way Jesus loves us, is meant to give a glimpse of the way heaven will be. This is why Paul's standards of purity in the Church were so high. He wasn't suggesting that we earn our place in God's kingdom through moral behavior; the first half of Ephesians celebrates the lavish grace by which God saved us and made us His people. Rather, Paul was explaining that our lives should reflect the character of our King and the kingdom we have inherited. The Church is meant to live as an outpost of God's kingdom here on earth.

So, Paul gave us a list to show us what it looks like to live in perfect light, without even a hint of impurity. The first two focus on actions, the last three on words, and the middle one reaches even to our inner thoughts and desires:

- "Sexual immorality" is *pornea*, from which we get our word "pornography"; it refers to all kinds of sexual immorality, not any specific type (5:3).
- "All impurity" is impurity in general, not just sexual impurity (5:3).
- "Covetousness" can also be translated as lust (not just sexual lust) or greed; it's the desire for something more than what God has given you (5:3).

These three things build on one another: no sexual immorality, not any immorality at all, not even thinking about desiring something you shouldn't have.

Then Paul used three different words for the way we talk to one another to make sure every hint of immorality was covered (5:4). Each of these words is used only here in the whole Bible, but they were commonly used in ancient Greece:

- "filthiness" – obscene, indecent, or base; morally repugnant or dishonorable
- "foolish talk" – (a compound of "fool" + "word") senseless or frivolous
- "crude jesting" – (a compound of "well" + "turned") witty, but vulgar or cruel

Paul said these are "out of place" or literally "ill-fitting," pointing us back to the old self no longer fitting us. Paul wasn't imposing a harsh set of rules on us; he was describing what it looks like to live as children of the light, to walk in love like Jesus. God has

rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of light (Colossians 1:13–14). We don't belong in the darkness; we belong in the light. These are two opposing kingdoms; we can't have one foot in each (5:7).

Paul also warned them not to be deceived about the seriousness of this kind of sin. God's wrath comes on those whose lives are characterized by disobedience, so believers must not join them in their sin (5:6–7). Paul wasn't telling Christians to avoid unbelievers; he was telling them not to participate in the sinful way they live. That is no longer who we are. We were once darkness, but now we are "light in the Lord," so our lives should increasingly reflect what belongs to the light—"goodness, righteousness and truth"—as we learn to discern and do what pleases the Lord (5:8–10).²

Paul wasn't imposing a list of rules; he was showing us the beauty of walking in the light. When we live this way, we will look so different from the rest of the world that we will be like a light shining on a hill for weary travelers (Matthew 5:14). Imagine if you were wandering in the darkness and couldn't find your way. But off in the distance, you saw the lights of a city shining through the night. It would feel like safety, provision, rest and refuge. That is what the Church is meant to be: a visible witness pointing those still living in darkness to the safety, rest and new life found in Christ.

Q: How has immorality within the Church damaged its witness to the world? What does this teach us about being careful how we walk (5:15)?

Q: Why is it important to focus on the way we talk and think as well as our actions?

Ephesians 5:11–14 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Children of light expose works of darkness.

Q: Why shouldn't we take part in the "unfruitful works of darkness"?

Q: What will shining a light on the deeds of darkness do? Why is that a good thing?

The last section focused on the purity of the light of God; this section focuses on the light as *guidance* and the thing that *enables us to see* the world around us properly. Paul had already told the Ephesians not to partner with those who walk in darkness (5:7). But here he even told them to expose the deeds of darkness (5:11). That includes refusing to ignore sin among fellow believers, but it also means allowing the light of Christ in our lives to expose the darkness in the world around us.³ In either case, the purpose isn't to act holier-than-thou. Light exposes what is hidden so it can be seen for what it really is (5:13).

Think about it on a physical level: Imagine someone you care about was walking in the dark. They kept tripping over stuff because they couldn't see and couldn't figure out where they were going. Maybe they even fell and twisted an ankle. What would be the

most loving thing to do for them? Turn on the light! In that situation, you would never leave them in the darkness for fear of offending them. You'd turn on the light so they could see.

This is what light does: it exposes what was hidden so it can be seen clearly. When we see sin among fellow believers, love does not simply ignore it. And as we live as children of light in the world, our lives and words also expose the darkness around us.⁴ The goal is to bring what is dark into the light so that it can be seen for what it really is.

Paul told them not to “take part in” the works of darkness (5:11) or “become partners with” the sons of disobedience (5:7). That doesn't mean we can't be friends with unbelievers. If we want to share the Gospel with unbelievers, we have to build authentic relationships with them. Paul wasn't telling Christians to avoid unbelievers; he was telling them not to participate with them in the sinful way of life they had left behind.⁵ We *once were* darkness, but now we are light (5:8). Our relationships with people who don't know Christ should never require us to join them in the darkness. Instead, we bring the light of Christ with us.

That is why our lives themselves can expose darkness. Because we have the Holy Spirit in us, we bring light with us wherever we go. When we walk into a dark room, we light it up. As we live lives characterized by goodness, righteousness, and truth (5:9), the contrast helps reveal the works of darkness for what they really are.⁶ Paul tells us not to partake in the deeds of darkness, but he doesn't tell us to withdraw from the people around us. We are called to live as children of light right in the middle of a dark world. This isn't about separating ourselves from the world in a holy huddle; it's about shining the light of Christ through our words and the way we live.

Paul closed this section with a “saying” that isn't a direct quotation of any one Old Testament passage. It may have come from an early Christian hymn and echoes several passages in Isaiah, especially the call to “arise” and shine because God's light has come (Isaiah 60:1; Isaiah 26:19).⁷ The saying describes Christ's light shining on someone who had been sleeping in darkness: “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you” (5:14). Some understand this as a believer waking up from sinful behavior, while others see the imagery pointing toward someone coming out of spiritual darkness into the transforming light of Christ.⁸ Either way, the central image is the same: Christ's light brings darkness into the open and calls people to walk in the light. Christ's light is fruitful, while the deeds of darkness are unfruitful. Christ brings life while darkness brings death.

That gives us two important applications. When a brother or sister in Christ begins walking in darkness, we love them enough not to ignore it. And when we live among those who don't know Christ, we shine His light through lives of goodness, righteousness, and truth. In both cases, our goal isn't condemnation or shame. We want people to see the darkness for what it is and experience the life found in Christ.

Q: Describe a time when someone exposed dangers in your life and helped you see the truth. How did he or she do it? How did you respond? What did you learn?

Q: How can we expose works of darkness in a way that points people toward the light of Christ rather than simply making them feel condemned?

Ephesians 5:15–20 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Children of light make the most of every opportunity to shine.

Q: In this context, what does it mean to make the best use of the time?

Q: What happens when we are filled with the Spirit?

Q: If you knew you had only one week to intentionally shine the light of Christ into the lives of the people around you, what would you do differently?

Paul began this section by telling the Ephesians to look carefully at how they walk (5:15). In other words, pay careful attention to how you live. Children of light should walk wisely, not foolishly. Wisdom is a major theme throughout Scripture. It begins with the fear of the Lord (Proverbs 1:7) and means trusting His direction rather than leaning on our own understanding (Proverbs 3:5–6). If we are going to shine the light of Christ into the world around us, we first need to make sure we are walking in His ways ourselves.

Paul then implored them to “make the best use of the time” because “the days are evil” (5:16). The phrase can carry the idea of “redeeming” or “buying up” the time. The picture is not simply about squeezing more productivity into every minute of the day. Paul was telling them to make the most of the opportunities God gives them—to live wisely and do what is good in an evil age. In the context of walking as children of light, that includes opportunities to shine the light of Christ into the lives of others.

This fits with the way Paul described our mission elsewhere. As Christians, we aren’t on this earth just to be happy. We have a mission. We are ambassadors of God’s kingdom, sent into the world with a message of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:17–20). We are all missionaries in the sense that God has placed us in the world to represent Christ and share the Good News of the Gospel, even if that mission field is our own hometown. Our homes can become little outposts of God’s kingdom in the world around us. Paul called this the “ministry of reconciliation,” and it’s in the same passage where he talked about being made a new creation in Christ. There is a similar progression in Ephesians:

- new creation = ambassadors of the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:17–20)
- new self = children of the light exposing darkness of the world (Ephesians 4:17–5:20)

Our new identity doesn’t just change the way we live for our own personal sense of morality. It gives us a new purpose in life. We no longer live for ourselves; we live for

Christ and represent Him to the world around us. To accomplish this, Paul called the Ephesians to live wisely by understanding the will of the Lord (5:17). He wasn't telling them to discover God's hidden plans, but to understand and live according to the will God has revealed in His Word.⁹

Then he implored them to be filled with the Spirit instead of drunk with wine (5:18). This isn't outlawing all drinking, but it is clearly outlawing drunkenness, which Proverbs, the book of wisdom, also warns against (Proverbs 20:1; 23:20–32). Paul's contrast is about control: when someone is drunk, alcohol influences and controls his behavior, but believers should yield themselves to the influence and control of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰ This isn't a one-time experience but an ongoing pattern of life.¹¹

Paul then described some of the results of being filled with the Spirit, using three different terms for sacred music: psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. When we are filled with the Spirit, our lives overflow in worship. We speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; we sing and make music to the Lord from our hearts; and we give thanks always and for everything to God the Father (5:19–20). Spirit-filled living changes both the way we relate to God and the way we relate to one another.¹²

The imagery of light adds another dimension to Paul's description of the new life. Our new identity changes us personally and shapes the way we live together as the Church, but its impact doesn't stop there. Children of light shine into the world around them. As Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, nobody lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. They put it on a stand so it gives light to everyone in the house (Matthew 5:14–16). This is part of our mission and our very identity as children of light: to live in such a way that the world around us sees the light of Christ.

Q: If you were explaining what it means to be a “child of light,” what would you say?

Q: How might our lives be different if we really focused on our mission to be ambassadors for Christ in the world?

Q: How might our churches be different if we saw them not as “holy huddles” but as lighthouses on a hill for the world to see and be drawn to Jesus?

Week 10: *Children of the Light: Ephesians 5:1–20*

Took

Main Point: Living as children of the light means living in purity and exposing darkness.

Prayerfully choose one way God is leading you to live as a child of the light this week:

- Through your actions of sacrificial love for someone (5:2)
- By examining yourself and getting rid of any impurity God reveals to you (5:3–5)
- By examining where people are trying to deceive you and exposing that darkness (5:6)
- By examining your relationships to see if there are any you need to break off because they are leading you into deeds of darkness (5:7–12)
- By lovingly bringing works of darkness into the light—whether that means addressing sin in the life of a fellow believer or shining the light of Christ into the world around you (5:11–14)
- By looking carefully at how you are living and making the most of the opportunities God gives you to live wisely and do what is good (5:15–17)
- By yielding yourself to the Holy Spirit and allowing your life to overflow in worship and thanksgiving (5:18–20)

Pray about how God is leading you and then go do it this week!

CHALLENGES

THINK: Be honest with yourself and, as Paul commanded the Ephesians, look carefully at how you are walking in your life. Are you walking in God’s wisdom? Are you shining His light? Are you loving others the way Christ did? Are you partaking in deeds of darkness? Are you being filled with the Spirit? Are you being an ambassador for Jesus or hiding your light under a basket?

PRAY: Pray for both fellow believers who may be struggling with works of darkness and those who do not know Christ and are still walking in darkness. Ask God to give you wisdom, love, and courage to shine His light into the lives of others. Thank God for rescuing you from darkness and bringing you into His kingdom of light. Ask Him to use you as an ambassador for His kingdom to share His light with the world. Praise Him and thank Him for all He is as our light. He is pure and makes us pure. He is powerful. Praise and thank Him for all He does for us as the light – guiding us, bringing us life, enabling us to see, bringing us warmth and comfort.

ACT: Be the light. Start this activity with prayer because you want to know how God is leading you, even if it's a hard or uncomfortable thing. Choose an area of focus and commit to live as a child of the light this week.

¹ <https://talkerresearch.com/survey-reveals-link-between-horror-movies-and-fear-of-the-dark/>

² Harold W. Hoehner, "Ephesians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 638–39.

³ Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2271; Hoehner, "Ephesians," 639–640.

⁴ Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2270; Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014), 126–127.

⁵ Hoehner, "Ephesians," 639; Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*, 126.

⁶ Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*, 126–127.

⁷ *ESV Study Bible*, 2270; Hoehner, "Ephesians," 639; Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*, 127.

⁸ Hoehner, "Ephesians," 639; Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*, 126–127.

⁹ *ESV Study Bible*, 2271, note on Ephesians 5:17.

¹⁰ Hoehner, "Ephesians," 640.

¹¹ *ESV Study Bible*, 2271, note on Ephesians 5:18.

¹² Hoehner, "Ephesians," 640; *ESV Study Bible*, 2271.