

The church - children of the light

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[0 : 00] Our Bible reading is from Ephesians chapter 5, verse 3 to 21, and I'm reading from the NIV Bible, 2011.

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

Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk, or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving, for of this you can be sure, no immoral, impure, or greedy person, such a person is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath come on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them.

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light, for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth.

[1 : 34] And find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret.

But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. Fourteen, this is why it is said, Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.

Be very careful then how you live, not as unwise, but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit.

Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God, the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Twenty-one, submit to one another, out of reverence for Christ.

[2 : 48] This is the word of the Lord. Thank you. If you can keep your Bibles open in front of you, that's where the word of God is, and that's what we want to listen to.

And also there's a sermon outline in your bulletin as well that will help you to follow along. Well, let's ask for God's help.

Father, I pray that your Holy Spirit, who dwells in us, the spirit of wisdom and revelation, will work in us powerfully this morning through your word to help us to know you better and to make us more like you.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Now, if you're ever to go hiking in a national park, chances are that you want to stay on the trails.

These are paths which have been designed and designated to be used by anyone who wants to walk through nature and enjoy its beauty. But sometimes the trails can be quite frustrating.

[3 : 56] You might be walking on a trail, for instance, when you hear the sound of a waterfall. But you can't see it. And the great temptation is to wander off the trail and head in the direction of that lovely sound.

After all, it's only for a minute or two. Why do I stay on the trails when going off the trail seems like a far better option? Ask the park rangers, however, and I'll explain to you why staying on the trail is so important.

It's actually good for both the environment and yourself. Often, plants, animal habitats, and the fragile soils can be trampled beyond recovery by people stepping on them without even realising it.

Organic matter, such as leaves and the soil itself, can be accidentally dislodged, raising the possibility of significant soil erosion. Long-term damage to the beauty of the area can be caused by people leaving their imprints again without realising it.

And finally, there's the safety issue. You might not be able to see it, but the short distance between leaving the trails and the sound of the waterfall could be filled with all sorts of dangers.

[5 : 22] Slippery surfaces that could leave a fractured ankle. Hidden wildlife that gets agitated when disturbed. And that's why the trails have been designed to keep you out of harm's way.

And anyway, if you were to stay on the trail long enough, soon you'll come face to face with an even more glorious waterfall further on. So staying on the trail is good for everybody.

Now today's passage is a bit like those trails. There are quite a lot of rules and instructions, aren't they? All asking us to stay on the path. And they can sometimes seem very frustrating.

No off-colour jokes, no unlimited alcohol. It feels like no fun. But this is important to get from the very beginning. They are designed for the good of everyone.

It's designed with you in mind and those around you. So that's the basic mindset we need to have as we listen to Ephesians 5, verse 3 to 21 this morning.

[6 : 33] And remember, how the book of Ephesians is designed. Paul doesn't start off by telling us how to behave. Instead, he gets us to behold.

Behold our God. He grips us with this drama of Jesus Christ triumphing over the evil powers, ruling over them in the heavenly realms, and uniting all heaven and earth under himself.

He causes us to stand in awe as we discover that Jesus has resurrected us from eternal death, saving us by grace so that we're no longer objects of God's wrath.

And then we are astonished as he turns his church into one new humanity, Jew and Gentile together, created to be one body, so that God's wisdom can be displayed to every creature in this universe.

That's Ephesians chapter 1, 2, 3. And in that section, he hasn't given any instructions. He simply wants us to behold the Lord Jesus. Because only by beholding can behavior change.

[7 : 49] We don't threaten or scold or condemn God's people just like that. For that never results in true change. We must first and foremost be gripped by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And only then will we begin to walk the way God wants us to. But to walk the way God wants us to means not walking the way the world wants us to.

Have you ever tried walking eastwards and westwards at the same time? You can't. You're either walking towards God or away from him.

We can only choose one direction. So last week, we saw that to walk God's way means that we cannot walk the way of our past. We once lived like the Gentiles, but we're now to put on new selves and to build up one another in the way that we speak.

So that's how we are to walk with each other as one body. But that raises the question, what about the world? What about when we're in the world and not just with Christians?

[9 : 04] How are we to walk in this world? And the basic answer is found in verse 8. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

Live as children of light. So here's the good news. When we become plugged into Jesus, we become alive. The switch comes on.

We become light. We brighten up. That's our identity now. That's who we are. So what do children of light do? Well, that's what today's passage expands on.

So let's just look at three ways we live as light. The first way is this. Don't become dark. Don't become dark.

That's verses three to five. And it sounds obvious, doesn't it? If you're light, how can you be dark? It doesn't make sense. And what is darkness?

[10 : 09] Verse three, it's sexual immorality, impurity, and being greedy. Verse four, it's being obscene, engaging in foolish talk or cause joking.

But here's what makes it complicated. The darkness is inviting. What's being covered here in verse three is everything from adultery to looking at pornography to lustful thoughts.

And there's a reason pornography is a multi-billion dollar industry. It feels good to look at those images. it's gratifying to have a long second look at the guy or the girl in the street who's wearing skimpy clothing.

The darkness is inviting. It's inviting because it's actually using something that God created good. Our sexuality which is to find its full expression in marriage between a man and a woman.

And it takes that good thing and twists it so that we express it in ways simply to please our own desires. It becomes all about ourselves.

[11 : 27] And perhaps that's why greed is included in this list too. You might have found it strange at first sight to find sexual immorality and greed next to each other.

but perhaps they're not as different as we imagine because both have to do with unrestrained desires. They're about wanting more.

More food, more property and yes more indulgence including of a sexual nature. They invite us to please ourselves as we like.

the darkness invites us to fix our minds on something, become stimulated in our senses and then consent to an action whether that's looking at a screen or accumulating more stuff.

And if it gets habitual it becomes an addiction. addiction. And that's when the darkness reveals its true colours.

[12 : 39] For addictions are destructive. The person hooked on alcohol for instance can't work well, becomes moody to his family and spends money recklessly.

The person hooked on money becomes stingy, works long hours to the detriment of his health and views his colleagues as threats to his career progression.

And the person hooked on pornography will have his relationships with the other sex affected and indeed contribute to global injustice because his habit actually encourages people to prey on vulnerable women to get them to enter into the sex industry and use them to get themselves more money.

You see, these things can give temporary pleasure, but God knows they are destructive in the end. So that's probably the reason why God says in verse 3, but among you, they must not be even a hint.

That's the standard, not even a hint. Wow. any kind of impurity, and that's not just sexual impurity, is to be excluded because we are light.

[14 : 08] So when people look at our Christian community, they are meant to see nothing of this sort amongst us. The standard is so high because the stakes are so high.

if we engage in this kind of behavior constantly, we end up destroying ourselves and others as well. And indeed, when we come to verse 5, we find a stark warning there.

Verse 5, for of this you can be sure, no immoral, impure, or greedy person, such a person is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

This isn't saying that if we stumble from time to time in this area, we are outside of God's kingdom. But it is saying that if we are characterized by immorality, impurity, or greed, with no sign of remorse, we are back in the position of the Gentile in chapter 4, verse 19.

We must not be fooled. If we are like this, it's clear that we have not yet become part of God's new humanity because there's no sign of renewal in you.

[15 : 29] These things do matter for the consequences are severe. You're outside God's kingdom. So check yourself.

Are you really a Christian? Are you light? Or are you still in darkness? Because being light is about being different.

That's why verse 3, these things are improper for God's holy people. That's why verse 4, this kind of speaking is out of place.

We're different. We're meant not to speak as the world does, but to speak words that build up and give life. words that we heard about last week.

So you can see what seems to be on the surface to be simple and straightforward. Don't be dark. It's not simple. Many of us know very well that it's a struggle.

[16 : 34] And so how can we fight the darkness in us? Well, one way we've seen already is to remember the different motivations found in verses 3 to 5.

We are God's holy people. That's one motivation. We have no inheritance in God's kingdom if we walk the way of darkness. That's another motivation. And those are all appropriate motivations to help us fight, to help us to stay on the path.

But there is another way in this section to fight the darkness. it's right there at the end of verse 4. Did you notice it? After listing six different things to avoid, Paul simply lists one thing we are to cultivate.

Thanksgiving. You see, to fight lust and greed and improper speech, we don't just need accountability partners and exhortations and spiritual disciplines.

Those things have their place and their uses. But ultimately, deep down, what we need is a deep, abiding, joyful gratitude to God for what he has done.

[17 : 54] When we grasp how great God's love is for us, when we get how deep his forgiveness goes, when we have an unwavering conviction that he really does desire the best for us, then our hearts will be thankful and our hearts will long to please him.

Walking God's way then is not about trying to repay his sacrifice, but it's simply about bringing him delight. To avoid immorality and cause joking and so on, it's not so much about doing our duty, but about bringing him joy.

And so that means we need to look long and hard every day at the light of the world, Jesus. We need to intentionally reflect daily on Jesus, how he didn't die for you when you were exercising perfect self control, or having perfect attendance at a prayer meeting, or being perfect in your words.

No, no, no, he died for you when you were at your worst. That moment you lost self-control. That time you lost faith.

And when we truly understand that, our hearts sing with gratitude for Jesus loves us beyond what we can imagine, and then we would want to live for him.

[19 : 25] To defeat sin, we don't become preoccupied with our sin, we become preoccupied with our God. Let me say that again.

To defeat sin, we don't become preoccupied with our sin, we become preoccupied with our great God. Then we don't become dark.

And instead, we'll live the second way. We'll live as light. We'll live as light. Yet another obvious statement.

But what does it mean? Well, verses 6 to 14 are going to describe three characteristics of light. And that will make it clearer for us. Number one, light doesn't partner with darkness.

That's verses 6 and 7. I mean, just think about it.

[20 : 40] Where light is, darkness cannot be. If you bring a torch or a candle into a dark room, it brightens up the place rather than darkens it. Light cannot do the things that darkness does.

They are opposites. They cannot be partners. And so is Paul saying that we cannot be friends with non-Christians? Well, no, since Paul himself clearly hung around with non-Christians.

Paul is not saying that we should all become monks and nuns, huddled in our churches, afraid to go to the cinemas, the concerts, and the community events. No, he simply means, don't share with them in their wrong behaviour.

By all means, see your non-Christian family and friends. Let them know you care for them. But you cannot participate with them in anything you know is wrong.

So when a business partner approaches you with a proposition that requires you to do some under-the-table dealings, you cannot go along with it, even if that means losing profit, because you are light.

[21 : 57] When a friend suggests that you shouldn't be such a spoiled spot, but go along to that party which you know will have plenty of temptation to do the things of verses 3 and 4, well, you have to say no, because you are light.

When a family member starts pressuring you to date that non-Christian because it's time to settle down, you have to resist because you are light.

Indeed, it's a good idea to think about the company you keep. Be honest. Are you really being light with those you hang out with? Or are they always inviting you into darkness?

Are they always sweet talking you to participate in your actions? don't need to be so holy-holy la. Buster not here, ma.

What he doesn't know won't hurt him. Are they speaking empty words to you? And are you deceiving yourself? You think you're being a light to them, but actually it's you who are getting all tangled up in the deeds of darkness.

[23 : 12] If so, don't fool yourselves any longer. you need to put some distance between you and such people. As verse 11 puts it, have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness.

Look for those who would encourage you to live as light instead. And that brings us to characteristic number two. Light exposes verse 11 again.

Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. Now, if you will walk into your house without switching the light on, you can't see anything in it.

You can't see the furniture, you can't see the walls, you can't see anything. But flip the switch and all that is in the room becomes exposed. The darkness is now revealed and everything becomes visible.

And that's what we're doing as light. We're to be what some theologians call a contrast society. What they mean is that the way we live would naturally appear as a contrast to the world.

[24 : 34] If we truly live as Jesus shaped people, we would naturally show that the world's way of living is actually poorer. Paul isn't saying that we live with an attitude that we are somehow morally superior to other people.

No, no, he's saying that as the world watches how believers confront their own sins, how they seek and offer forgiveness, how they try to reconcile with one another, and how they are serious about what they say they believe in, it will expose the alternatives as being much less attractive.

Sexual immorality and greed will be seen for what they truly are, dark and shameful. Instead, the light will transform.

That's characteristic number three, light transforms, and that's the point of verses 13 and 14. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible and everything that is illuminated becomes a light.

This is why it is said, wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you. Paul is loosely quoting from Isaiah here, and the basic point he seems to be making is this, when the light comes, yes, everything is exposed.

[26 : 08] When God speaks truth into your life, there is nowhere to hide. Everything you've ever done wrong, every evil thought, every evil intention, every evil action will be made known.

It's going to be uncomfortable. It will probably even be painful. But God doesn't just speak truth into your life, he speaks grace as well.

For he can turn your darkness into light. You see that in verse 13, everything that is illuminated becomes a light. And when Christ shines his grace into your heart, it's the equivalent of being raised from the dead, he transforms you.

And that should give you great hope. Perhaps earlier, when you were listening to that long list of wrongs in verses 3 and 4, your heart was gripped by fear.

Because you know very well you're guilty of some of those things. You know the impurities that stay in your heart, mind, and so. And yes, God doesn't sweep those under the carpet.

[27 : 27] He says to you, those are shameful things. He doesn't say those things are okay. Instead, he is honest with you. You are darkness.

You're not just living in darkness. You are darkness. That's verse 8. Light. But now he offers you hope. You can be light.

You're not just living in the light. You are light. Because Christ himself can transform your very being if you let him.

If you recognize the darkness in you and you cry out to Christ, get me out of this darkness, Lord. He will. raise you from the dead.

He can give you a new life, free of those things that used to mark you. He wants to. It's transformation he's after, not condemnation.

[28 : 29] He wants you to know in Christ, you can be light. And how do you know if you're truly light? Well, verses 9 and 10 tell us for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth.

And find out what pleases the Lord. That's a good test. If you're bearing this kind of fruit, you are light.

The fruit might not flower all at once, it might come in spurts. But if you're really wanting to know what pleases the Lord, you are light.

God wants to use your light to illuminate others and transform others as well. And that brings us to the third way this morning we live as children of light.

By walking wisely under the Spirit's influence. We walk wisely under the Spirit's influence. That's verses 15 to 21.

[29 : 37] If we want to be light, we're going to need wisdom. We're going to need to know what the Lord's will is. Hence these words in verses 15 and 16.

Be very careful then how you live, not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil.

therefore do not be foolish but understand what the Lord's will is. And the good news is, according to Ephesians, God has already given us all these.

Come back with me for a moment to Ephesians chapter 1 verse 8 to 10. Familiar verses by now if you've been following the Ephesians sermon series all throughout. I think it should appear on the screen.

Ephesians chapter 1 verse 8 to 10. Let me read it. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment, to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

[30 : 58] What is God's will according to those verses is to bring everything under the lordship of Christ. It's something he wants to do through his church.

That's his master plan. Being wise is all about knowing God better and aligning our lives with his master plan.

In other words, to live wisely is to be gospel-centered. to live wisely is to have God's gospel priorities in our day-to-day living.

To live wisely is to make decisions that take into account whether Jesus is being glorified or whether it builds up others or helps you to become more and more like Jesus.

And that's why earlier in chapter 1 verse 17, Paul praised this. It should also be on screen, I think. 1 verse 17. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of wisdom, that's about being wise, and revelation, that's about knowing the Lord's will, so that you may know him better.

[32 : 22] To be gospel-centered, we need to be filled with the spirit. That's what verse 18 tells us. And what does that mean?

Again, the context tells us, notice that being filled with the spirit is contrasted with being drunk. Let me just read chapter 5, verse 18.

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the spirit. You see, what happens to people when they are under the influence of alcohol, as we normally say?

They lose self-control. They lose restraint. That's why it leads to debauchery, which is just another way of saying reckless living. It leads to all the stuff that we've talked about in chapters 4 and 5 about obscenity and sexual immorality and greed and bitterness.

And so Paul says, come under the influence of the Holy Spirit instead. Let Him fill you.

[33 : 32] And when you are filled with the Holy Spirit, you will live godly lives. Can you see how different this is from how people often describe being spirit-filled?

When people talk about being spirit-filled, they might mean speaking in tongues, or falling down, or the spiritual high that you get after a rally with an exciting speaker.

But that's not what being filled with the Spirit means. It means being filled to become more and more like Jesus. Come back with me to chapter 4 verse 13 and let me remind you what the goal of the church is to be.

I think it's also on the screen. 4 verse 13. This is the goal of the church. to reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Did you see that? We are to be mature by knowing Jesus more and more and to be filled up with him. And that's why the Holy Spirit won't be grieved in chapter 4 verse 30 if you're speaking words of life, not unwholesome words.

[34 : 49] Because you're becoming more and more like Jesus. You're filled up with him, so to speak. So we are to long for the Holy Spirit's influence.

We are to keep asking God for more of that influence. You see, every person when they become a Christian gets the Holy Spirit. There's no such thing as a Christian without the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians chapter 1 verse 13 makes that clear if you want a reference. However, we need to increasingly come under his influence in order that Christ will be formed in us.

And that's a lifelong process. And that's why we ask to be filled with the Spirit. And what would a Spirit-filled church look like?

Well, verses 19 to 21 tells us. Now, in the NIV, they split it into a few sentences to make it more readable. But it's actually one long sentence in the original Greek showing that it's all connected to one another.

[36 : 03] And basically, to be filled with the Spirit will show itself in two ways. Edification and exaltation. Edification is seen in the first half of verse 19 as well as verse 21.

Let me just read verse 19. Speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. So you can see that the focus of verse 19 is not so much on God but on each other.

In this case, it's about singing to each other. Did you know that's who you're addressing when you're standing to sing every Sunday from 8.30 to 9?

You are praising God most definitely but you are also addressing one another. You are reminding each other when you sing how great Jesus is, how gracious he is, how glorious he is.

you are building each other up. That's why we need to sing songs rooted in biblical truth. You don't want to be singing lies to each other. Now, a church that sings well isn't necessarily a healthy church but a church that doesn't sing at all is definitely a warning sign the church is not healthy.

[37 : 33] Because Paul tells us a clear sign of a spirit filled church is one that sings to build each other up. If we don't want to sing, we lose the way of building each other up.

And if we're happy with that, it's actually a symptom that we're being self centred. It's a sign that we're not letting the Holy Spirit influence us.

so let's sing. We want to be a spirit-filled church as defined by Ephesians. Let's sing.

And we also edify each other as we submit to each other. That's verse 21. We'll stop being domineering and arrogant. And in the next two weeks, Paul will show what that looks like between wives and husbands, parents and children, slaves and masters.

So we'll leave that for now. But the other way we know that we are a spirit-filled church is if exhortation of God is clearly there.

[38 : 44] That's how we can sum up the second half of verse 19 to 20. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul isn't talking so much about a certain atmosphere or a certain vibe that we must feel. Rather, he concentrates on the attitude of our hearts.

And notice once again what that attitude is. Thanksgiving. The very thing that will help protect our hearts from ungodliness. us, a people filled with the Holy Spirit, will overflow with joy knowing what Jesus has accomplished.

We won't be bored with the gospel, thinking of it as yesterday's news, but we'll be constantly in love with Jesus, sensing his love and wanting to please him.

God wants his church to be. That's what God wants from us as his new humanity, to be children of the light.

[40 : 02] He desires this for our good and ultimately to bless the world. So my brothers and sisters in Christ, I plead with you today. Don't let this message be another that goes in one ear and out another.

if you be this light, you can really make a difference in your own lives and in the lives of those around you. And to those in the audience this morning who come to church regularly, but to whom Jesus doesn't make a difference in your day-to-day life, you need to hear this warning.

You might not have an inheritance in the kingdom of God. these are not empty words. But come, receive the word of the gospel, be filled with Christ and give thanks to him and move from darkness to light.

Amen. Thank you.