

COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS
II. PAUL'S CHALLENGE TO THE EPHESIANS

12.

D. WALK NOT IN LUST, BUT IN LIGHT
EPHESIANS 5:3-14

The fourth challenge Paul gave to the Ephesians concerning how to walk worthy of their high calling in Christ Jesus was to walk not in lust, but in light. "Lust" means to have a strong desire for something that is wicked and evil. Usually it refers to evil sexual desires, and Paul used the word in that way in Ephesians 4:19. In this passage, he used the word with a wider application. He included attractions to all kinds of vicious evils, including greed, filthy actions, coarse talking and crude joking. Paul urged the Ephesians to avoid all forms of evil desire.

The contrasting way of life to lust that Paul recommended was to walk in light. Lust is darkness. It leads to stumbling, falling and death. Light enables a person to see dangers and avoid them and also to see opportunities and take advantage of them. Enlightening of the mind comes from Jesus. His light enables a person to see the dangers of lust and avoid them.

1. [Not in lust] (5:3-8a)
 - a. [Avoid all these forms of lust] (5:3-4):
 - (1) ***But*** [these] ***must not be named among you, as is proper for saints*** (5:3):
 - (a) ***Sensuality*** (5:3a)
 - (b) ***And all uncleanness*** (5:3b)
 - (c) ***Or greed*** (5:3c).
 - (2) ***And things that are not appropriate*** (5:4):
 - (a) ***Coarseness***
 - (b) ***And foolish talking*** (5:4a)
 - (b) ***Or crude joking*** (5:4b)
 - (3) ***But instead giving of thanks*** (5:4c)
 - b. ***Knowing this*** (5:5-8b):
 - (1) ***That every lecher or unclean person or greedy person*** (5:5b),
 - (a) ***Who is an idolater*** (5:5c),
 - (b) ***Has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God*** (5:5d).
 - (2) ***Let no one deceive you with empty words*** (5:6-8),
 - (a) ***For because of these things God's wrath comes on the sons of disobedience*** (5:6b).
 - (b) ***Therefore, do not become participants with them*** (5:7-8),
 - [1] ***For you once were darkness*** (5:8a)
 - [2] ***But now [you are] light in the Lord*** (5:8b).

Verses 3-4. These things must not be named among you. Paul listed six evil actions that people lust for. The first was sensuality. The Hebrew word Paul used applies to any kind of illicit sexual expression. Its use was broad enough to include adultery, fornication, prostitution, homosexuality, incest, rape, pornography, or any other kind of sexual expression. Most versions translate the word as "fornication;" however, NIV, TNIV, and HCSB recognize the broader meaning of

the word and translate it as "sexual immorality," while NIV translates it as "sexual sin," Douay as "sexual vice," and SGV and NASB as "immorality." Paul covered all forms of sexual sin with one all-inclusive word.

Paul's warning was brave because of the licentious culture out of which the Ephesians had come and in the midst of which they still lived. He was challenging a wide-spread and popular way of

living. His warning was greatly needed because immorality was accepted as normal in Greek society, while morality and sexual purity were ideas foreign to Greek culture. However, his warning is equally brave and needed for every other culture that has not been steeped in Christian ideas. Sensuality is a natural urge of fallen human nature. It is a virtually universal weakness of humans wherever the gospel of Jesus is little known. The only power that can control it is the cleansing power of Jesus' salvation. Paul called on the Ephesians to depend on Jesus for strength, adopt a sexually clean way of living, and rise above the baseness of the culture around them. Jesus calls on all Christians everywhere to do the same.

Sexual sin is the prime example of how the devil and sin can turn a beautiful blessing from God into a selfish and ugly abuse. Christians need to live in such a way that their lives demonstrate that sexual faithfulness to one's spouse is not denial. It is preservation of the holy, uplifting, ecstatic, and reproductive power of sex between a man and a woman committed to a loving relationship with each other for life. Immorality is destructive and debasing. Loving sex in marriage is uplifting, beautiful, and binding. It is the adornment to a loving relationship that spice is to a good meal. The light of Jesus enables His followers to see how to hold onto that good blessing from God and not exchange it for the degrading substitute of licentiousness invented by the devil.

The second form of lust Paul mentioned was "all uncleanness." That word also was broadly inclusive. It included any kind of action that was contrary to God's commands and people's harmonious relationship with each other. Paul's term revealed that every way of acting and living that is contrary to God's commands is dirty, cheap, and degrading. The natural desires of human beings are not to be trusted. It is a serious "mistake" to say, "I was born that way" and assume that because desires are inborn they are right and good. The guide to what is right is the Word of God, and God's Word in this verse and in many other passages clearly declares that God's commands, not human desires is the way to find happiness.

The third form of lust Paul mentioned was "greed." Greed is a selfish desire to have wealth and possessions far beyond the limits of what a person needs. It makes a person take pride in having abundance while others suffer. It even leads a person to take advantage of people who are much less fortunate than they are. It reveals an unwillingness to accept what God has provided, and thus it becomes a form of rebellion against God. It eventually produces worship of possessions instead of God. Therefore, believers should learn to be grateful for what they possess and know that God will meet their needs, whatever they are and whenever they arrive.

Paul listed three other actions that he said were not appropriate or compatible with a believer in Jesus. The first was "coarseness." Fallen human nature has an inordinate desire for deeds that are hurtful, cheap, and ugly. It finds strange pleasure in seeing someone suffer, if not physically at least emotionally. It makes a grown man or woman revel in crude behavior like a little boy wallows in the mud. Jesus lifts a person above that kind of cheap behavior, and Paul challenged the Ephesians to live in that higher, better, cleaner way of behaving.

The second inappropriate action that Paul mentioned was "foolish talking." Silly speech, implausible stories, and shocking tales attract attention and often make a person seem to be the "life of the party"; but they are useless, degrading, and unfitting for a believer in Jesus. Sadly, "standup comedy" has made silly and incongruous entertainment a staple in modern society. It degrades the home that allows it to flow in through a television set, and it cheapens the heart of the person who laughs at it. It is inappropriate for a believer in Jesus.

The third inappropriate action that Paul mentioned was "crude joking." A story about an unfaithful husband or a tale about a shocking cruelty always seems to produce a loud laugh from people with unsaved and unclean natures. Exclamatory curses and damnations attract many, who think it is a forceful way of expressing their feelings. Unnecessary sprinkling of sentences with words about excrement and stench are considered by many to be a way of spicing up their

vocabularies. All of those forms of crude joking should be completely out of bounds for believers. They do not uplift. They degrade and turn people's minds to the gutter and to what is cheap and devilish. They should be cast aside as unnecessary and undesirable by all followers of Jesus.

Instead of all of those forms of cheap and dirty acting and speaking, Paul recommended giving of thanks. Everyone has much to thank God for. God is good even to the poor and the unnoticed. He is kind and loving even to the sick and hurting. Even the humblest have much to thank God for, and they should be careful to express it. Jesus Himself was poor all His life and completely unknown until He was announced to the crowds by John the Baptist. He suffered more than any other man who ever lived. Yet His life has produced more good for the world and for humanity than all other lives put together. He had much to thank God for, and He spent His entire ministry sharing all of the blessings He enjoyed. When we learn how to have the same spirit of thankfulness for what we are and what God has given to us, it opens the door to contentment and happiness. It also gives a powerful testimony to the power of Jesus to give real meaning to a person's life.

Thanksgiving should not be a once-a-year celebration for a Christian, but a moment-by-moment way of living.

Verses 5-8. Do not participate in deeds that exclude the disobedient from God's kingdom. Paul described the overriding reason why believers should avoid every kind of lustful action. It was because lust excludes a person from God's kingdom. He renamed the first three kinds of lust that he already had listed. They were "lecher," "unclean person," and "greedy person." He said people who practice those actions are idolaters. People who are possessed by those kinds of desires and caught up in those ways of living actually are worshipers of those evil deeds. Their lives are devoted to those ugly attractions, and that devotion is equivalent to worshipping an idol. Sinful and crude living becomes their religion and takes possession of their lives. Paul said the Ephesians should not allow the empty words of people who enjoy and advocate such actions to lead them astray.

Paul called on the Ephesians to recognize that the practice of such sinful deeds excludes the "children of disobedience" from God's kingdom. The "children of disobedience" are people who regularly and deliberately disobey God. Disobedience is their way of life. They belong to it as a child belongs to his father or mother. People who belong to that way of life are not a part of God's kingdom. Their lustful deeds earn for them banishment from God and eternal suffering in hell.

Paul did not mean by those statements that, if a believer in Jesus commits a lustful act, he is cast out by God and loses his position in God's kingdom. A Christian may commit such an action by weakness and not intend by it to rebel against God or to show lack of faith in Jesus. His failure is due to weakness, not rebellion. If a believer does fail in any of the ways Paul listed, the natural action for him is to regret his failure, repent, ask to be forgiven, and receive restoration. But Paul appealed to the Ephesians not to have to repent of such actions because they did not want to commit an action that would cause an unbeliever to be excluded from God's presence. Seeing a believer commit a lustful act causes unbelievers to mock him and to conclude that his faith in Jesus is a farce and he is a hypocrite. When a Christian falls into any form of lustful behavior, he may not be excluded from God's kingdom, but he will definitely do damage to himself and to those who see his disgraceful action. He surely will be in bad company, and he should escape from that company immediately. Just because a true believer in Jesus is pardoned from every penalty of his sins and saved for eternity does not provide for him even the tiniest excuse to participate in actions that send unbelievers to hell.

Paul said the reason the Ephesian believers should not participate in the deeds of the "sons of disobedience" was that they once were darkness but now they were light in the Lord. Jesus had made them new. He had enlightened their eyes so they could see. They were no longer in darkness. They had Jesus' light within them. They were able to shine that light out to others. Therefore, they had no business taking part any longer in the evils of those who still were living in darkness.

2. *Walk as children of light* (5:8c-14)
 - a. *For the fruit of the light* (5:9-10)
 - (1) *Is in all goodness and righteousness and truth* (5:9),
 - (2) *Demonstrating what is pleasing to the Lord* (5:10).
 - b. *And do not have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness* (5:11-14),
 - (1) *But instead reject* [them] (5:11b-12),
 - (a) *For it is shameful* (5:11c)
 - (b) *Even to talk about the things being done by them in secret* (5:12b).
 - (2) *But everything that is disapproved is revealed by the light* (5:13-14),
 - (a) *For everything that is revealed is light* (5:14a).
 - (b) *Therefore it says* Is. 9:2; 26:19; 40:1; 51:17; 52:1; 60:1] (5:14b-14d):
 - [1] *“Get up, sleeper, and rise up from the dead* (5:14c),
 - [2] *“And Christ will shine on you”* (5:14d).

The way of life Paul recommended to believers in contrast to lustfulness was to walk as “children of light.” Instead of belonging to the family of the lustful, they belong to the family of light. They should live like it. Jesus gives light so believers can see the ugliness of lust and unclean living and so they can see the benefit of unselfish and clean living. Therefore, Jesus’ followers should walk every day in the light He shines on them.

Verses 9-10. The fruit of the light is goodness, righteousness, and truth. Paul said the reason the Ephesian believers should walk in the light was that the fruit of the light is “in all goodness and righteousness and truth.” Fruit is what a tree or bush produces. Fruit of the light is what light produces in a person’s life. The light of Jesus in a person’s life produces all kinds of goodness, righteousness, and truth. A believer needs to let the light produce its fruit. He does so by letting the light shine into his life. He will not shade himself from the light by hiding in dark, worldly surroundings. He will expose himself fully to the light of Jesus through prayer, Bible study, worship, and fellowship with other Christians. When he does, the light will just naturally cause goodness, righteousness, and truth to grow in his life. He will not have to struggle to practice what is good and right and true. It will just naturally grow up in him, because the light of Jesus will bear its fruit, and the fruit will be a natural product of his dwelling in the light.

A few ancient manuscripts contain the words “fruit of the Spirit” in this verse, but the majority read “fruit of the light.” The strong textual

evidence is conclusive that “fruit of the light” is the correct original wording that Paul wrote down. Most likely “fruit of the Spirit” mistakenly got entered into some ancient manuscript because of the familiar passage in Galatians 5:22 and then got copied from it into other manuscripts. Light from Jesus and the Spirit Jesus sends both produce the same kind of fruit.

When the light Jesus shines in believers’ lives produces its fruit, the life that person lives demonstrates what is pleasing to the Lord. The word translated “demonstrating” means “proving” or “providing proof.” Here it means to provide proof or evidence to show to others what pleases God. The best proof that goodness, righteousness, and truth please the Lord is a life that lived in the light of Jesus.

Verses 11-14. Therefore, have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. The person who has in his life the fruit of light should not have any association with works of darkness because they produce no fruit at all. Weeds and thorns may grow from them, but no usable fruit at all. Paul said, instead of associating with works of darkness, believers should reject those works completely. They should separate themselves totally from such works and not allow them to have any influence on their lives. Paul’s advice should be followed by every believer in Jesus.

Paul said a reason the Ephesians should separate themselves completely from works of darkness is that *“it is shameful even to talk about*

the things being done by them in secret.” The Ephesians should not only not practice deeds of darkness, they should not even include them in their conversations. When Paul said it was shameful to talk about such deeds, he did not mean to never mention that such ugly actions were being committed. He himself was mentioning them in this very passage to warn against them. He meant the Ephesians should not dwell on those ugly deeds, describe them, and converse about them because they have some interest in them. They should conduct their conversations on the level of deeds that are uplifting, not on those that are degrading.

Paul went on to say that the Ephesians would be able to recognize the deeds of which God disapproved because Jesus’ light would reveal their ugliness. Light is what enables a person to see. No matter how good a person’s eyes are, they are useless in the dark. It is light that reveals objects and enables a person to see them. In the same way, Jesus’ light enables the eyes of a person’s heart to see how ugly sin is. Then the insight that comes to them will become light itself. When they see how ugly sin is, that knowledge will give light to them. It will enable their lives to enlighten others of the dangers of sin. Their lives free of sin will enlighten others and help them turn away from sin as well.

Conclusion. When believers reject the deeds of darkness and walk in the light, they work in harmony with each other and become productive for God. They also become lights revealing God’s ultimate plan to unite all things into one harmonious companionship at the End, reflecting His likeness and living in His love forever.

Paul closed his appeal with a quotation from a poem whose source is unknown. The poem is not found anywhere else in the Bible. Some think it is part of a hymn that believers sang in that day. Others are troubled that Paul would quote from an uninspired source. However, many words are spoken by preachers, singers, and witnesses that are not inspired in the sense of being perfect or inerrant, yet they are true. The Holy Spirit put His stamp of approval on the truth of this poem by leading Paul to quote it as a part of His inspired writing to the Ephesians.

The poem calls on unconcerned, sleepy-headed believers to wake up and to arise from the dead. The challenge to “rise up from the dead” is a harsh judgment on some believers. Yet it is true that some people believe in Jesus and then become so listless that they are as unresponsive to the Holy Spirit as if they were dead. Such a condition is tragic for a believer. Any such person should hear God’s call to them, rise up, and see what God wants them to do. The poem goes on to say that, when sleepy-headed believers wake up, Christ will shine His light on them. They will see and start to live fruitful lives for Him.