

The Letter Of Paul To The Ephesians

*⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.
(Ephesians 1:7-10. ESV)*

Message 20

Shine

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Ephesians 5:3-14

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Introduction:

Good morning! Open your Bibles to Ephesians 5:3-14. In chapter 4 the Apostle Paul used the standing illustration of putting off and putting on clothing in order to speak to us about the process of Christian growth and sanctification. Now in chapter 5 he introduces a second standing illustration. He introduces the imagery of darkness and light to speak about the process whereby a Christian is lifted up out of the dark and clinging muck of sin and positioned in such a way so as to reflect the glory of God as light unto the world. I hate to use a Star Wars comparison here but this is very much like that scene in The Empire Strikes Back where young Luke goes to Dagoba to learn how to be a proper Jedi from Master Yoda. He crashes his X wing fighter into the swamp and as one of his training exercises Master Yoda instructs Luke to try and lift it out of the swamp using the force. He struggles and strains and the fighter begins to lift and free itself from the muck only to have the swamp seemingly assert itself and swallow it whole into the dark and dreary world below. Do you remember that scene? Of course, once Luke has completed his training he is able to lift the fighter clear of the swamp and move many other objects around but the process of freeing his fighter from the swamp is symbolic of his growth in power as a Jedi. In much the same way Paul speaks to believers about how the Gospel – which saved them while they were dead and buried in the swamp – will by the power of the Holy Spirit lift them out of the darkness of self indulgence and position them to reflect the glory of the risen Lord upon a dark and dying world. Instead of an x wing fighter, Paul seems to conjure the image of a moon being raised up out of the muck and set within the darkness of the night sky with its face towards

the hidden sun reflecting light and life to the world below. That is the standing metaphor or illustration that Paul calls upon throughout this section of text. Let me read it to you and then we'll go back and revisit in greater detail the various components of his argument. Hear then the word of the Lord:

³But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. ⁴Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. ⁵For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. ⁶Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. ⁷Therefore do not associate with them; ⁸for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹(for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), ¹⁰and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹²For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. ¹³But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, ¹⁴for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,
“Awake, O sleeper,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.” (Ephesians 5:3-14. ESV)

There appear to be two main moral admonitions followed by a quotation from an early Christian hymn that Paul uses to summarize his teaching. The first moral admonition runs from verse 3 through verse 7. Here Paul is saying:

Moral Admonition #1:

Have nothing to do with sexual immorality or greed – whether in practise or association

As I read those verses 3 questions come immediately to my mind:

1. What is it exactly that we are not supposed to do?
2. What is at stake for those who persist in disobedience?
3. What does it mean to “not associate” with those who do such things?

Let's deal with those in order. First of all:

1. What is it exactly that we are not supposed to do?

The first set of words we need to understand are found in verse 3:

³But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.

These are the deeds of darkness, this is swamp behaviour and we need to leave it behind, Paul says. The first word translated as “sexual immorality” or in some of your Bibles as “fornication” is the Greek word *porneia* from which we get our English word pornography. It means any form of sexual activity that is outside the Biblical prescription. The Bible says that the marriage bed is pure. Sex between a husband and wife is pure and good and wholesome. Everything else is *porneia*. This word can mean sex before marriage, it can mean sex with a prostitute, it can mean what we call pornography and it can mean adultery. It is a general word whereas adultery is a specific word. In the same way that all dogs are animals but not all animals are dogs, so all adultery is *porneia* but not all *porneia* is adultery. Adultery is a very specific and loathsome form of *porneia* but ALL *porneia* is forbidden to the Christian.

The second word translated as “impurity” means pretty much what you think it means. It means impurity or in some of your Bibles “uncleanness”. It refers to things that defile the body and soul – we might use the word “dirty” today. Things that make you dirty. Don’t do them. Those deeds belong to the dark and to the swamp. Leave them behind.

The third word there is the Greek word *pleonexia* which means avarice or greed. If you are wondering what these words all have in common, it is that they are the opposites of what it means to live lovingly and generously as commanded in chapter 4. These words have to do with rampant self gratification. If I may over generalize a bit, I would say the sin of self gratification in men is more likely to express itself in terms of sexual self gratification. In women, this same sin is more likely to manifest as greed and covetousness. Now, that is not to say that women do not struggle with sexual lusts – of course they do – or is it to say that men do not struggle with greed – of course they do. But in general, I find when talking to men, particularly married men, they are most likely coming to seek help with one of two problems. Their own sexual self control or the issue of how to manage a wife that is never content. She always wants more money, longer vacations, a bigger home and more luxuries for the kids. Those are, it seems to me, the two most common conversations that I have with men in this church. Greed; ladies, is just as sinful as pornography. Indulging in luxuries while poor Christians starve to death is

altogether as foul as visiting the strip club. Therapeutic shopping is just as sinful as self soothing sexuality. Paul deals with all of us in terms of the sin of self indulgence.

The second set of words is found in verse 4:

⁴Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking

The three Greek words here all mean more or less the same thing – they refer to coarse, sexual joking. This is swamp humour and it has no place in the church. This is the sort of humour you hear in the change room of the YMCA; our culture has turned this sort of humour into an art form and an industry. Sexual comedy is an actual genre of movie now in Hollywood. The 40 Year Old Virgin, Roadtrip, The Hangover – such movies are full of filthy, foolish, crude joking and a Christian should have nothing to do with these movies. Let me be real specific. If you have rented or watched the movies I just mentioned or others like them, the Bible says you ought to be concerned for your salvation because a Christian wouldn't do that. A Christian would walk out of a movie like that if he stumbled into it by accident. He'd turn it off if he was watching it at home. He'd know it for what it is: swamp humour belonging to the dark.

Now we need to deal here in the place of conviction with the question of pace. The Bible never tells us how quick and how clean our exit from the swamp ought to be. It doesn't say: "After conversion you have 6 months or 6 years or 6 seconds to leave all swamp behaviour behind". It doesn't say that probably because everyone who gets saved has come to Christ from a different place with a different set of challenges. Every generation deals with a different set of cultural pressures. I think it is safe to say that sexual purity is harder for converted men to achieve in our day than in any day previous. I will be even more specific and say to you teenagers, if you have come to Christ I believe your struggle for sexual purity will be even HARDER than mine was 20 years ago. In my adolescence, if you wanted to view pornography you had to go up to the lady at the Variety Store counter and ask for a magazine. They were stored behind the counter in cases so that you could only see the title, not the cover. You had to say to the lady: "I am a sick pervert. May I please have that magazine?" That was a serious barrier and a serious help toward holiness in my day. You don't have that help. It comes to you on your cell phone, via snapchat and Twitter and who knows what else. It will be harder so I'm not going to say: "Here's how long it took me in my day" and then say: "If you go 10 minutes longer than that you are not

saved”. I’m not going to do that because I don’t see the Bible doing that. I don’t know how long it will take you to be lifted out of the muck and set upon the rock with respect to sexuality. Some of you, raised in good homes where limits were set on TV and computer use and where mom and dad modelled healthy sexuality within Biblically boundaries and blessed with helpful body chemistry will nail this with seemingly no difficulty at all – God bless you! May it be so for all of you, but some of you without those advantages are going to struggle. Do not give up! Do not. Fight! Fighting is FAITH! Surrendering is unfaith – it is just that simple. Struggle is no proof that you are not a Christian. Surrender is. Accommodation is. Justification is. Fight it. Hate it. Pray for grace. Accept help. Use the means of grace and persevere until God in his perfect timing lifts you out and sets you free. That will happen if you are truly saved. I know that for a fact. The Gospel ALWAYS WINS in a truly converted person.

The struggle is real and, according to the Bible the stakes are high. So we need to ask the question next:

2. What is at stake for those who persist in disobedience?

The Bible is very clear on this:

⁵For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

Those who persist in sexual sin or in self indulgent greed – those who surrender and justify a perpetual accommodation with lust or covetousness – those people reveal that they are not saved, the Gospel has not penetrated their hearts and they are therefore excluded from the kingdom of God. They will not go to heaven. The Bible is entirely consistent on this point, let me show you two other places that say exactly the same thing:

Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10. ESV)

²⁶For if we willfully persist in sin after having received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,²⁷ but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. (Hebrews 10:26-27. NRSV)

To go back to our standing illustration, if you never rise up out of the swamp, if you struggle and strain for a bit and then fall back into the mud in surrender then you will sink down and be swallowed unto death. You show yourself in the end to be unconverted because the Gospel always wins. He who began a good work in you WILL BE FAITHFUL TO COMPLETE IT therefore if the job doesn't get done then it was never begun by God; it was just an act of the flesh. It was just a surge of religious moralism. It wasn't the Gospel; it wasn't the Holy Spirit because if it was then you would have won. The power of God always prevails over the power of darkness. We serve a RISEN SAVIOUR amen? Amen.

Thirdly then, with respect to this moral admonition,

3. What does it mean to “not associate” with those who do such things?

Paul says in verse 6:

⁶Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. ⁷Therefore do not associate with them;

There are going to be people out there that tell you that believing in Jesus does not mean that you can't sleep with your boyfriend, or that you can't live a self indulgent lifestyle or that you need to do anything different than everybody else is doing. Don't listen to those people. Even if they call themselves a Christian. Even if they are the lead singer for a band that gets played on Life 100.3, even if they go to the coolest church in town. Such people are fools. They are deceived. The Bible says: 'Do not associate with them' and so we need to know what that means. To help us with this we need to pay attention to the specific word that is used and to other verses in the Pauline corpus that seem to be saying more or less the same thing. The word used here is the word *summetochoi* and it means together associated or together partnered. Paul has already used it once before in this letter back in 3:6:

⁶This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and **partakers** of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. (ESV)

There the term seems to mean to be officially joined with someone else in something. That is definitely not a casual association, that is intimate co-membership. Let's look quickly at 2 Corinthians 6:14 where Paul says:

¹⁴Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. (ESV)

He uses a different word there but the principle appears the same – we do not want to become co-members or official partners or solidly joined with people who are living in the ways of darkness. If we want to get out of the swamp, we don't want to be handcuffed to people who like living in the swamp – that just makes sense. Practically speaking I think that means that we don't marry or date unbelievers – Paul makes that point explicitly in 1 Corinthians 7:

she is free to be married to whom she wishes, **only in the Lord**. (1 Corinthians 7:39. ESV)

According to the Bible it is more than foolish to date or marry an unbeliever – it is sinful, it is against the clear command of Scripture. Don't do it. I think we would also take it to mean that we need to be very careful about our business partnerships. You can work for a determined pagan if you are resolved to quit if you are ever asked to do something contrary to faith but it gets very tricky when you have skin in the game. Being a financial partner with an unbeliever is at the very least unwise and if that partner is living in the ways of darkness, then it is a sin. Be wise and do not be associated with those who love the darkness.

The second moral admonition is given in verses 8-13 and we'll deal with it more briefly.

Moral Admonition #2:

Live in the light

He says that very plainly in verse 8:

now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (ESV)

The Greek word translated as “walk” is the word *peripateo* and it has the sense of “to live” or “manner of living”. Live in the light! Live like who you are in Christ! You are not a swamp person anymore, be lifted up from that and take your place in the light of the Son! That's the idea

here and Paul uses very simple and brief phrases to describe what it looks like to live in the light. The first thing he says is that:

1. Life in the light is characterized by goodness, righteousness and truth

⁹(for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), (ESV)

Obviously those three words are meant to be heard as opposites of the three words he uses in verse 3 – immorality, impurity and covetousness. Those are swamp virtues; in the light we do the exact opposite. We live within the permission and prescription of God. Our sexuality is good and wholesome, our focus is on real and true things rather than false and fading things.

Secondly Paul says:

2. Our light is reflective – it comes from our contemplation of the Son

He makes explicit reference to that in the hymn quoted in verse 14 but he hints at it previously in verse 10 when he says:

¹⁰and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. (ESV)

The word translated as “discern” or in some of your Bibles as “find out” literally means to study and approve of. Paul is telling us to study Jesus, his life and his commandments and to delight in imitation. This is the activity of the person who loves the Lord. Jesus said:

¹⁵“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. (John 14:15. ESV)

John says of himself in 1 John

²¹Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God, ²²and can receive whatever we ask from Him because we keep His commands and do what is pleasing in His sight. (1 John 3:21-22. HCSB)

The elder John says to his church members: “The reason I have such power in prayer is because I have made it my obsession to discover and do those things which are pleasing to the Lord – so

ought you to do!” As we study Jesus and as we come to love what he loves and hate what he hates we increase our share in his power and light. Again, to go back to our standing metaphor, as we are lifted out of the mud and as we align ourselves with the Son we increase the brightness of our witness to those who live in darkness below. Thirdly he says:

3. Reflection requires separation

Look at verse 11:

¹¹Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness (ESV)

You cannot shine on the swamp when you are in the swamp. Separation is required – difference is required. The Bible says this again and again in many different ways. Salt that has lost its saltiness is good for nothing, Jesus said – that means exactly the same thing. To have influence, to shine your light as a witness to his goodness and glory, you must be different, you must be apart from the swamp. If I wanted to use this mirror to reflect light on my Bible from that spotlight up above me I could not do so while the mirror was folded inside me Bible. It would have to be apart from my Bible to do it any good. So it is with us and our world. I know that people tell you that to have influence and to reach the lost you have to get down into the mud with them, you have to watch their movies, sing their songs and hang out in their bars – but where is that in the Bible? Seriously where is that? I know you think it is in there, people try and quote it to me all the time, they’ll say: “but wasn’t Jesus a friend to sinners? Didn’t he go out to the prostitutes?” Really? Is that what the Bible says? Let’s check. The story you are thinking of is recorded in all three of the Synoptic Gospels, this is how Luke records it:

²⁹And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them. ³⁰And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” ³¹And Jesus answered them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ³²I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” (Luke 5:29-31. ESV)

Let’s notice a few things. First of all Jesus was in the house of Levi – who was a Christian. He was not in a bar. Second of all, these sinners came to him; they came seeking him! Luke implies that but Matthew states it explicitly. Matthew says:

¹⁰And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and **sinners came** (Matthew 9:10. ESV)

They came to him!! He was eating in a Christian's house and some sinners came to him. He did not go down to the local beer hall looking for some drunks to preach to. Next we want to notice that his relationship with them was that of physician to sick person. It was not a friendship like you might have with your squash buddies or your euchre buddies – he was a DOCTOR treating SICK PEOPLE. Next notice that it doesn't say that Jesus came to hang out with sinners and to affirm them, it says:

³²I have not come to call the righteous but **sinners to repentance.**" (Luke 5:29-31. ESV)

This passage in Luke is regularly recruited to endorse things that the Bible never endorses. It is an abuse of the text to say that Jesus went to bars and brothels looking for sinners to be friends with and therefore we should do the same. That's not what he says and that's not what Paul says. Reflection requires separation – influence requires visible and tangible DIFFERENCE. Fourthly, Paul says:

4. All light is antagonistic to darkness

He says that in verses 11-13:

¹¹Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, **but instead expose them.** ¹²For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. ¹³But when anything is exposed by the light, **it becomes visible,** ¹⁴for anything that becomes visible is light. (ESV)

Paul is getting this idea from Jesus; Jesus said basically the same thing in John 3:

²⁰For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. ²¹But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God." (John 3:20-21. ESV)

If you live like this – if you come out from the mud and you study Jesus and are changed into his image and you let your light shine rather than hiding it under a bushel – if you live like that – two things are going to happen. The people who really love the mud are going to hate you and the people who are destined for salvation are going to come forth and shine with you for the glory of God. Now some of us think we can do the latter without doing the former. Some of us think

there is a way to witness to sinners without offending the stubborn. It can't be done. They will hate you not because you are being mean – though they will say that about you – they will hate you because you make them look bad. Your good life condemns their bad life. They look at your life and they FEEL JUDGED – long before you ever open your mouth. We've experienced this time and again at this church. People have visited our church and have left after one or two visits saying that they FEEL JUDGED. Does that mean we are a judgemental church? No because many other people have come here and sat through the same services and talked to the same people in the lobby and they feel loved and welcomed and helped and SAVED – why? What's the difference? The difference is that some see what's going on here and receive it as a rebuke against all that they love and live for. Others see it as the way home. Jesus said that it work this way and so did Paul. Light is simultaneously a beacon and a judgment depending on what you love.

Conclusion:

Lastly, look again at verse 14 as we close. Paul isn't saying anything new here, he is wrapping up his teaching with a quotation from an old hymn, the rest of which has been lost to history:

Therefore it says,

“Awake, O sleeper,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.” (ESV)

You know this, Paul says, you sing this every week. The Christian life is about resurrection! It is about being lifted out of the mud and turning your eyes toward Jesus so that we all with unveiled faces beholding the glory of the Lord as though in a mirror may be changed and may SHINE! We are a city on a hill, we are a light in the darkness and we must SHINE for all to see. Some will hate us, some will follow us and find Christ and be saved! We can't control that – our job is just to shine. Our job is to live this out. Our job is to fight the flesh in the resurrection power of Christ. Rise and SHINE! Don't bridge the gap church – SHINE THE LIGHT! That's our evangelistic strategy. This is how we're going to pierce the darkness and this is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.