

# Why Your Sin Must Go

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**Bible Text:** Ephesians 5:7-10  
**Preached on:** Sunday, November 1, 2015

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I hope you that you are coming to love those God centered hymns as the weeks and months and years go by. I find it very refreshing and appropriate to sing songs that are focused on our Lord and his attributes rather than concentrating on us and our emotions and our weak faith in response. There is just something very appropriate about that that the Lord would be the center of our music and the center of our preaching, because the church belongs to Christ. You know, we come together here not primarily for ourselves and not to seek that which would be a blessing to us, but we come because the Lord Jesus Christ has laid down his life for a people and we are a part of that people and the church belongs to him. So the praise and the focus and the words and the direction of coming together as the people of God should be oriented toward him and not toward ourselves and so we're just grateful for the repository of hymns that God has given that help us express that in union with the saints that have gone before us over the centuries that had a like precious faith with us in the same Lord and we're just grateful to be able to do that. One of the reasons that we do that among many, is that we understand and we know that when trials come in your life, when the deep waters start to rise up and get toward your shoulders and your neck, it's going to be those hymns of the faith that sustain you, that come to mind, and those words will resonate in your heart and you'll sing them. You'll sing them on your sickbed. They'll be sung to you on your deathbed. In all of that, there's going to be the strength of the Holy Spirit conveyed to you as you remember those glorious truths which we have sung together over the years. So I am just grateful for the musicians that help us express that, grateful for the wonderful music that Michael brought to us earlier.

So with hearts full of joy, we come to the Scriptures here today and finally get to come back to the book of Ephesians 5. I invite you to turn there. Our text today comes again from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, Ephesians 5, and we're up to verses 7 through 10 for our text today. And as we have sung praise with our lips and as we voice the joy and the gratitude that's in our hearts toward Christ verbally, our text today reminds us that there is another equally important aspect of praise and that we praise God with our lives and that praise that comes only from lips is empty and really nothing more than a dead faith that cannot save. True faith, true evangelical faith, true biblical faith, true saving faith, is that which has a transforming impact on life and changes someone who, as we read in the Gospel of John earlier, changes someone from someone who was comfortable in the realm of the lies and murderous desires of Satan to someone who rejects that and now has

a heart for holiness. That is a sure, that is an ever present, that is a certain mark of true salvation and what we're reading here in the book of Ephesians in chapter 5, is the Apostle Paul fanning the flames of those desires for holiness; fanning the flames for sanctification and helping us to understand, to have a mindset that gives us the strength to pursue holiness of life, to step away from sin as Christians, and to pursue that life which God has called us to be.

Verses 7 through 10 are our text today. It's often asked what version are we using? I preach out of the New American Standard version, although others in our congregation would read from the ESV or something like that. Ephesians 5:7 says,

7 Therefore do not be partakers with them; 8 for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light 9 (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), 10 trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.

Now, if you had not been part of our church in recent months and if we hadn't been teaching through the Ephesians letter, if you just asked somebody in Christian realms what comes to their mind when the word and the book of Ephesians is mentioned to them, they are probably going to emphasize and go and talk about how Ephesians teaches the sovereignty of God in salvation in the first couple of chapters, or that "by grace through faith you have been saved and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God," Ephesians 2:8-9, and all of that is true and it's right and it's a proper way to think about the book of Ephesians. Those great themes of the Bible should come to our mind as we think about the book of Ephesians, but perhaps what is a little bit lesser known, what is given just a little bit less attention as you go through the book of Ephesians, and what is perhaps less emphasized by some who hold to the doctrines of grace, is that there are consequences of God's sovereignty in salvation for holy living. It is not simply enough to be able to articulate the 5 points of Calvinism. It is not enough to be a staunch defender of the doctrines of grace if it does not have a corresponding impact on the holiness in the way that you live. You cannot separate Ephesians 4 through 6 from the first 3 chapters of Ephesians. You can't stop at Ephesians 2:10 and say, "Everything that is necessary for me to know and teach and proclaim and defend about biblical truth has already been stated," because Paul goes on and he continues to write and he writes in chapter 2, verse 11, down through the end of chapter 6 the great doctrines of the first 3 chapters are laying a foundation for implications that you and I are meant to take and to understand and meditate on and apply and have our lives transformed by them.

You see, it's not enough to gather together as good as it is to have so many of you here gathered together in the room, it's very encouraging to me. I love that and I thank you for coming and trust that this will be a blessing to you today, but it's not enough for us to simply come to church Sunday by Sunday without having a corresponding profound impact in our lives. You know, Scripture calls you to holy living, if you name the name of Christ, and that means that you're going to have times where Scripture is confronting you in sin; it is rebuking your bad attitudes; it is rebuking your accommodation of sin and your mediocre spiritual life, and we need to equally embrace that convicting power of

Scripture as much as we embrace the glorious truths that it also contains. Beloved, if God has saved you, and I know that he has saved many of you in this room, if God has saved you, a holy sanctified life from you is the appropriate response in return. It's not enough to simply verbally give him thanks and verbal praise when we gather together on Sunday, your life on Tuesday morning and Wednesday afternoon and Friday evening is affected by the reality of salvation and that's what Paul is calling to our mind.

So when we think about it, we realize that we have been saved out of sin and yet there are still remnants of sin that are within us, what we realize is that the reality of salvation, the reality of Christ's saving work in your life, has a certain application that we can state in general terms like this: it means that your remaining sin has to go. It has to be put away. It has to be put aside and Paul has been emphasizing this ever since he turned the corner in Ephesians 4:1.

Look at that verse with me as we kind of reset the context. We've been away from Ephesians for 3 or 4 weeks now and so I just want to reset the context ever so quickly for you. Ephesians 4:1, Paul having exhausted all that he had to say about the glories of salvation through the first 3 chapters, now begins to apply it and he says in chapter 4, verse 1, "Therefore," showing that there are implications that flow from Ephesians 1 through 3 and "therefore" is a pivot to 4 through 6 and says everything that you believe all about the greatness of God in salvation and the wonders of salvation by faith and having been born again, having been lifted up into the heavenlies, that has applications for today. It's not merely something ethereal that's out there. It's not merely something for the future. It's not merely something cognitive, this goes to the very grassroots of how you live and a true Christian loves that. A true Christian embraces that and says, "Yes, I embrace that struggle because," here's why, "it's certain in true salvation."

You see, in true salvation someone who has truly come to Christ in the way that the Bible has prescribed is coming to Christ not in order to have a happy life. Not in order to have Jesus fix their marriage. Not in order to have Jesus give them a better job or prosperity or their best life now. That has nothing to do with biblical salvation. The real reason that anyone comes to Christ truly is because they are weary of sin. They are sick of sin. They hate sin. They want to be delivered from the power and the presence and the penalty of sin and so they come to Jesus as a Savior from sin, not merely from the trials of life. And because that is true, then it makes sense that a true Christian would continue forward in their Christian life after having been born again with an increasing practice of being separated from the remnants of sin that are still in them. That's what Paul is emphasizing here in these last 3 chapters of Ephesians. Now, there is something important to realize and part of the reason that Paul has to spend so much time emphasizing this is that there are still the remnants of sin that are in you. There are still inclinations that have not yet been perfected and the temptations of the world still whistle to you and you're sometimes inclined to get up and go after the whistle; to respond in sinful ways and to pursue sinful desires. Scripture is very realistic with us about that and if you are a true Christian, you know something about the tension of that. Paul describes it in Romans 7, desires for holiness and yet finding that he falls short of what the aspirations of his heart are.

Well, what Paul is doing in these final 3 chapters of Ephesians is he's strengthening our hand. He's helping us understand. He's giving us the strength, the mindset, the desires, the understanding that would help us advance in our sanctification. That's what you want, isn't it? Don't you want to grow in Christ? Don't you want, having named the name of Christ, some of you having come to Christ in just very recent months, don't you want to grow in Christ and not simply be someone who goes through the motions? You want the reality in your heart, don't you? That's why you're here. I know that that's why you're here and so that's what we're going to try to water and to help grow and flourish in your heart and life here today. That's why Paul wrote it.

So he says in chapter 4, verse 1, "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called." "You have this great salvation that I have just been explaining for 3 chapters," Paul says, "now I implore you. I beg you. I urge you. I encourage you. I exhort you to live a life that corresponds to the grandeur of the calling which you have received." And he says, "with all humility and gentleness, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Then in verse 17 he says, "So this I say," verse 17, I'll give you a second to turn the page. "So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart." Paul says in verse 24, "put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth."

So we have spent a lot of time going through those verses. This is just a little bit of a reminder, a little refresher, a little appetizer off the plate, to remind you and to reorient your thinking to what Paul has been talking about. This whole long section, Ephesians 4, Ephesians 5, he is repeatedly reinforcing the call to a holy life, but not just the call, not just setting a high standard and then leaving you to yourself to figure out how to get there, he gives you what you need. He supplies you the tools that are necessary to go out and complete the construction in so far as it depends upon you. What Paul has done in part that we saw the last time we were in Ephesians, one of the ways that he does this is that he puts sin in the context of its eternal consequences and he does this so it would train your mind, train your tongue, as it were, to find sin something very distasteful; something that is repugnant to your nostrils; something that is foreign to your taste buds in life and you would say, "No, that's not who I am. That's not what I want." So it reorients, it reconditions your heart. It renews your heart to think rightly about sin, to come above the earthly, fleshly attraction that it makes to you in the moment, to live beyond that, to look through that and say, "No, there is a supernatural, godly perspective that shapes my view of sin and that mindset is what is going to control my response to temptation."

How does he do that? Well, in part he teaches us, he reminds us, of the consequences of sin in verse 5, Ephesians 5:5. He says, "You know this with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God." Verse 6, "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of

these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience." You see, you need to be a thinking person as a Christian. You need not to simply, you can't live the Christian life simply according to whatever your desires of the moment are because your desires are fickle, your desires are often mixed, and sometimes the appeal and the pull of the world is going to be really strong, and if you've only been conditioned to respond to whatever you want in the moment, your Christian life is going to be a disaster. There is going to be a lot of inconsistency and failure in your life. So what you need to do is to be someone who thinks and who thinks through Scripture and what Scripture says about sin in general because that will help you apply it in particular.

What is Paul saying in those 2 verses? Well, what we saw last time was, remember and think rightly about sin this way: sin is that which excludes people from the kingdom of God. He says, "Sin is that which brings upon the wrath of God upon the heads of unrepentant sinners." He says, "It keeps people out of heaven. It subjects them to the wrath of God," speaking about immoral people who are not Christians, who have not been saved. Now, here's the connection that you're supposed to make. You're supposed to think about what sin is like, what its consequences are and say, "Oh, as a Christian, that's unthinkable to me. I am one who has been delivered from the power of sin. I am one who has been delivered from the penalty of sin. So it is unthinkable in the deepest recesses of my heart to go after, to pursue, to love, to want, that which has those kinds of consequences." You say to yourself, "Yes, there is still that corruption that remains in me, but I disown it. I reject it. I'm not going to heed it. I'm not going to feed it because I belong to Christ and God. He has saved me from sin. I have aspirations for holiness. I want to be like Christ." And so understanding and remembering afresh the consequences of sin reinforces your desires and your strength to do that. You remember, as it were, that those who practice immorality or have a greedy disposition do not belong to Christ. So you say, "I don't want to take a step back in that direction. God transferred me from the kingdom of darkness, why would I start to walk back toward it with my life and with what I cultivate in my desires?"

There is one other thing that I need to say and emphasize to you here, beloved, as I try to bring God's word to bear upon your heart and help you hear as God works through his Spirit in the teaching of his word, you need to understand something really, really vital and that is: the primary battleground for this, the primary battleground for your sanctification, for your growth in holiness, is not in what you do, it's in your mind. It's in your desires and you need to engage this fight in the desires of your heart. The sins of your mind are deadly. The sins of thought and desires and imaginations, even if you don't act upon them, are deadly because we love God from our heart and it is the heart that is the wellspring of what you say and what you do and if you are cultivating a sinful inner man while trying to maintain an outward external morality, you're doomed to failure. You're going to fall and so you need to address this in the realm of your desires and understand that even the desires are things to be repented of. Even the desires are to be rejected. Even the desires are that which you ask God to strengthen you in holiness and to turn you away from temptation. You have to fight it there and not be content with the fact that everyone will congratulate you on your external morality. That doesn't matter, in one sense, if it's not joined to a heart that is also in line with the desires of God. God does not

look on the outward appearance, he looks on the heart. So you must engage these things at the level of your heart desires.

Now, with all of that said by way of introduction, Paul has said those things in verses 5 and 6, now he's going to go on as we move into verse 7, he's going to go on and he's going to draw 3 implications from those realities. The realities that sin excludes people from God's kingdom, sin includes people in the wrath of God, and now there are implications that he's going to draw out designed to promote your sanctification, designed for your good, designed for your spiritual growth. So even as we receive these things, we realize that God intends our good even when he is addressing and rebuking our sin and that's what the perspective that we come. We come under the authority of God. We come submissively to the word of God. We come dependently to Christ and say, "Lord, lead us, instruct us and help us so that we would respond rightly to you."

I'll say one last thing before I get into the text. Why would we have that attitude? Because he is so supreme. Because Christ is so great. Because he is so worthy. Because he has loved us with such a great love, then it's only appropriate for us to respond as he calls us to do, isn't it? That's the right thing for us to do and what we see here in verses 7 through 10 is the way that Christ calls us through his word to respond to the reality of your salvation.

Now, what's the first implication that helps us understand why sin must go from your life? What is the first motivation that we get here that would teach us and instruct us and strengthen us to live a godly life? First of all, consider your partnership. Consider your partnership. Sin separates men from God. You as a Christian should understand the consequences that that has for the desires of your heart and what it means for the direction of your life.

Verse 7, chapter 5, verse 7 says, "Therefore." There is that word "therefore" again, drawing out implications of what he had just said. Because sin separates men from God, because sin brings the wrath of God upon the unrepentant, because you have been born again and delivered from the realm of Satan, therefore the implications flow. Consequences come. Verse 7 says, "Therefore do not be partakers with them." Do not be partakers with those who pursue those sinful things that Paul has been identifying.

Now, the construction as we have it here says, "do not be partakers with them." The Greek construction is often translated this way, "stop becoming partakers with them." The Ephesians and those who received this letter had apparently drifted into ungodliness like no doubt some of you have done here this morning. They have drifted into ungodliness and they had forgotten their first love. They had drifted away from that which had saved them and what Paul does here is he comes to them lovingly and corrects them. He says, "Cut it out! Stop! Don't do this any longer!" is the sense of the force of this, and you know that they were struggling with this. This wasn't an abstract discussion otherwise Paul wouldn't be addressing it. He wouldn't be talking about that which was not necessary in the setting. So we see that Christians need this instruction. They need this rebuke.

And let me just say, beloved, that when Scripture rebukes you, you should give thanks. If it convicts you, if it steps on your toes, if it gets in your kitchen, you should be glad because it is helping you do and become more of what God would have you to be. In like manner, when a Christian friend, fellow church member comes and says to you, "You know, what's going on, what you're doing in your life, it's wrong." Your immediate tendency, especially in that sinful state, is going to be react against it and, "Who are you to talk to me that way? You've got problems of your own," and resist it all. Beloved, beloved, beloved, don't be so stiffnecked. Don't be so hostile to that which would promote your holiness. We are meant to have a sanctifying influence on one another. Scripture has a sanctifying influence, our interactions with one another have a sanctifying influence. So we need to have tender hearts, responsive hearts, humble hearts that recognize, "You know, there are things in my life that need to improve."

Paul comes in that spirit and corrects them and what is he saying here? He's saying that because God's wrath falls on the unrighteous, Christian, you as one who has been declared righteous by the shed blood of Jesus Christ, you who have been born again, you cannot partake, you cannot share in that realm of darkness with non-Christians. And the word "partakers" here refers to more than social association. It refers to more than interacting and talking with them, for example, that's not what he's addressing. Elsewhere in 1 Corinthians, Paul says, "I didn't tell you not to associate with people of the world, with sinners, because then you'd have to go out of the world." It's not that you never talk with people or engage them in discussions, what this word "partakers" has the idea is that don't participate in their deeds. Don't share in their mindset. Don't adopt their worldview and let it influence your way of thinking. Don't do that because those who participate in their deeds share also as a possessor of their doom and why would you as a Christian have any interest in that? Why would you make one small step in that direction? You see, Scripture calls us to be separate. It calls us to step away from the world, to step away from its mindset, its philosophies, its conduct, because it is hostile to the world. We read in John 8 earlier in the service and we saw how Jesus was consistently confronting the Jews there saying, "You're of your father the devil. He was a liar from the beginning. You share in his lies." 1 John 5:20 says, "The whole world lies in the realm of the evil one." Well, we've got to understand that that means that there is going to be a separation. There is going to be a reaction and a separation that is settled in our heart toward that and not want to dive in with them in the muck of their ungodliness.

I realize for you young people, that this is a particular challenge for you, the challenge that your life is being formed and that the pressure that comes with that is great. Well, why don't you just respond to God's word now as a young person and say, "Do you know what? I'm going to cast my young life in with the people of God, with the word of God, with the Son of God and I'm going to start here at the age of 10, of 12, 14, because I'm just going to give my life over to Christ now." Why not do that? That's the right thing to do because you and I as Christians – this is so sweet, it really is – you and I as Christians, we participate, we are partakers in a different realm.

Look over at Ephesians 3. I know you have forgotten this verse because it has been so long since we've been there, but Paul says in 5:7, "Don't be partakers with them," those immoral and impure persons. In verse 6 of chapter 3, he had earlier used this word for "partakers" and shown the realm that we belong to. It's a completely different realm. Ephesians 3:6, he's speaking of Christian Gentiles and he says, "the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers," there's our word, "of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." You know, I realize that sometimes you feel like a stranger and an alien as you go through in this life. Sometimes it leaves you standing alone and sometimes it's your family and your closest blood relatives that are the most hostile to you in this and you feel isolated and separated and a little bit under attack. I get that. It's hard. Painful. It's sad even. But, beloved, what you remember is that while they may not partake with me, there may be a tax that way that comes because of my identification with Christ, I remember that I am a joint participator with something far greater, something far more precious. I partake with other Christians the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel; the promise of final glorification; the promise of the presence of the Holy Spirit through this time; the promise of the Gospel that those who believe in Christ, those who call upon the name of the Son of God will most certainly be saved and that's what I belong to. That's my partnership. That's what identifies me.

So even as you're feeling the weight of separation from the world, the tug of your temptations and the hostility of others, you realize and you are borne up and you are encouraged by the fact that there is a reality of a different partnership that defines your life now. And that gives you joy, courage, confidence, gratitude, that shapes your life in a way that helps you endure the hostilities of the world now and gives you also the internal motivation to reject and turn away from sin. Remember who you are partners with. We are partners with Christ, not with this wicked world that is passing away. And when that broad general principle is in your mind, then it starts to flow in and filter through and inform the way that you respond to specific matters of temptation and other things in your life. It's a whole mindset.

So Paul, go back to Ephesians 5:3 and 4. Just remember what he has been talking about, to call us away from. Ephesians 5:3, what is this separation? Immorality, impurity, greed, filthiness, silly talk, coarse jesting. What's in your heart. What's coming out of your mouth. The things that you are doing. Where your feet go. What your hands do. What your ears hear. What your eyes see. And yes, I'm not too proud to admit that that song, "Oh be careful, little eyes, what you see," just informed what I said to you, "For the Father up above is looking down in love, so be careful, little eyes, what you see." While that has been distilled down for children, understand that the message of that is expressing the greater, more significant, more profound things that Paul is saying here in Ephesians 5:3 through 10.

So, Christian, just do a little heart check. Put the thermometer into your heart and see where your temperature is that. What are your desires? What is it that you want out of life? How do you truly feel about the temptations? Do you hate them? Do you resist them? Because a redeemed heart, a regenerated heart is going to have a sense of hostility and opposition toward the sin that would seek to encroach upon your life. Paul is simply



calling on that desire in your heart, reminding you of it and feeding it so that it would take greater root. So your sin must go. Beloved, your ungodly talk, your ungodly behavior, you have to renew your war against that. You have to renew your commitment against that and realize that being a Christian means that you are called to a life of change, of progressive growth in holiness, and you rejoice in the ability to do that.

Now, Paul reinforces that reasoning as he moves along. He says, consider your partnership. You're partners in the Gospel of Christ, not in the ungodly lives of those who reject him and so let your partnership inform how you respond to spiritual growth. Secondly, he says, consider your present. Consider your present, who you are now. As he moves on, he stresses the contrast between their former and their current lives. He says, "Don't be partakers with them," verse 7, verse 8, "for," here is the reason that he's giving don't be a partaker with them. Why should I pay attention to this? Why is that a natural consequence of being a Christian? Why? "For," because, "you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light." He says, "You're a Christian now. You used to be darkness but now you're light in the Lord. Understand, remember the contrast, remember the past that God has delivered you from. Remember the past that you have rejected in your repentance and recall who you are now and let that inform the way that you live your life."

Paul here is using darkness and light in a symbolic way. Darkness representing ignorance of spiritual truth, sin, evil, wickedness. Darkness representing all of that which belongs to the realm of Satan and he says, "That's what you used to be." You know, it's interesting as you read that, look at verse 8 with me again. As you read that, notice what he says, he doesn't say that you formally were in darkness, he says, you were darkness. A non-Christian extends darkness wherever they are, even if they're outwardly moral and what we would call a basically good person. If there is not a love for Christ in their heart, a respect for God's word, a calling of people to repentance, a pursuit of holiness, then they are darkness. They are casting a shadow by their lives and by their conduct and by their thinking. They are casting a shadow on the light that God would bring to the world.

Paul says, "That's what you used to be when you were not a Christian." It's certainly true of what my life was. All of that anger and pride and all of the others sins of a young man that came out of my life, that anchored and dominated my heart. Oh, I grieve the thought of it, to remember the utter darkness that my life was and how it cast a shadow and turned people away from Christ rather than calling them to him. I grieve that to this day but that was true of my life. But do you know what? It was true of your life before Christ as well.

What Paul is saying here is, "Remember, you were darkness. Now remember who you are in the present. Now God has called you out of the darkness into his marvelous light. Now God has imparted his Spirit to you, given you a new nature in regeneration. Given you a new hope. Live according to that light rather than drifting back into the darkness. Christian, friend, beloved, your life should not be casting shadows on people in darkness through your angry attitudes and your sinful life and your spiritual indifference. Your darkness sets a pattern that makes it easier for others to move into sin also. Stop it!" is what Paul says. Stop doing that. Stop having that effect on your family.

Why? Look at verse 8 again, he says, "now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light." What does he have in mind? He makes a little parenthetical statement in verse 9, he says, "(for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth)." Those great spiritual virtues that come from God himself, his truth which confronts error and is found primarily in his word; the goodness, the holiness of his being, the holiness of Christ; that understanding which grants discernment and clarity of perspective to be able to know the true from the false, the right from wrong. He says, "That's who you are now. God has given you a new identity, a new nature, live according to it."

That's the mindset so you consider your present. You consider who you are. Spiritually speaking, I'll say it one time more by way of summary. Spiritually speaking, before you became a Christian and for those of you who do not belong to Christ now this is true of you now, this is a description of who you are right now, but for you as Christians, you were so permeated with sin, so identified with error and darkness, that you could not be separated from the realm which defined your existence. It's who you were. You belonged there. You were an extension of the kingdom of Satan. Wow, that's kind of sobering, isn't it? And to realize that those of you here that have not bowed to Christ, that's what you are now, wow, come out. Come out of that darkness and come to faith in Christ. You were so identified with it that you were one with it.

Now for those of you who are Christians, now you belong to an entirely new dominion. Now you belong to an entirely new realm. Now you are in union with the Lord Jesus Christ and you are so closely identified with him, so joined to him by the Holy Spirit that you cannot be separated from him. You are in union with Christ and you belong to him. You are his and his life flows through you. His spiritual blood courses through your spiritual veins. You are on the receiving end of divine favor. You are included in the divine purpose, established before the beginning of time, working through time and will be culminated in glory after the end of time. That's what you belong to, Christian, most of you in this room, speaking on faith. That's what you belong to. The goodness and the truth and the holiness and the purity of that. What a high calling God has bestowed on your life. What a lofty purpose he has given to you who once belonged to darkness. Well, all Paul is saying is in light of those glorious truths, live like it. Let that shape what you desire and let that shape what you think and shape what you do.

Look over at Colossians, 2 books to the right, after Philippians and then to Colossians. As we have often said, Paul wrote Ephesians and Colossians at the same time, really, in his Roman imprisonment and so there are a lot of common themes that are in play between the 2 books; they elucidate one another. In Colossians 1:13 Paul says, "He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." Consider your present, beloved. Remember that God has transferred you from one domain of slavery and darkness into a different, completely separate realm of light and freedom in Christ and when you remember your origin, you remember where you came from, then you are much more likely to live in accordance with it. That is the force of his argument and because God has given you a new nature in Christ, because God has imparted his Spirit to you, do you

know what that means? It means that your sin has to go. You have to put sin to death. You have to work out your salvation with fear and trembling. You have to manifest the reality that is already true about you, that you belong to the kingdom of light and you're going to live accordingly. You think differently. What entertains you is suddenly completely different. Your desires, your goals, your priorities in life are completely reoriented, redefined, made completely new.

You young guys out there, you young ladies, children that believe in Christ and are trusting in him, understand that what this means for you is so critical. It's so vitally important. It means that what you start to give yourself to in your life with your education and the activities that you are interested in and what you pursue, that there is going to be a different defining force about what you think is important. The activities that you give yourself over to, that you spend your days and weeks and months over to, you have to ask yourself, "Is this actually furthering my identity and my purpose and my existence as a Christian or is there anything even distinguishable about what I do and what I most love and care about from my non-Christian friend?" That's a hard question to ask. You start to pull gripping fingers away from things that you love right now.

Well, you have to ask those questions and even as a little 5-year-old boy, you can ask these questions and say, "I'm going to give my life over to Christ. I'm going to love him and I'm going to give my life to Christ." And you settle that kind of conviction in your heart as a young person and God will water that and providentially order your life and make you into a man, a woman, a young person of God that is worthy of the name. Isn't that what you want out of life? Don't you want to have a life, don't you want to live a life that just radiates and sparkles and declares the glory of God by your very being? Isn't that what you want as a Christian? Aren't you content to let the world go? Its recognitions? Its accolades? Its trophies? All that stuff? If by letting that go your life would be a greater vessel for the glory and the proclamation of the Savior who gave his life for you?

Eventually each one of you have to answer that question in your heart and say, "What is it that I'm giving myself over to?" And for those of you that are like me a little further along in life, 50, 60, 70, 80, should I keep going? I'll stop there. If you can look back on a Christian life that God has blessed, give him thanks now and just say, "God, thank you. You delivered me in my young age and by your grace you have given me a life that was separate, that was different. And while I was not all that I could have been, thank God for what you have done in my life. Father, I still love you. I love you more now today than I ever have in the past in my Christian experience." And if you squandered a lot of opportunity, well, do you know what? I've got a piece of good news for you here. You squandered opportunity, your family isn't what it could've been because you didn't lead it the way you could have, I've got of word of good news for you that is undeniable, absolutely undeniable: the fact that you are here and still breathing means that God still has good purposes for you ahead, even if you squandered opportunities in the past. You do not have to be chained to your past failures. Paul here is writing to help Christians, as it were, break from those bad patterns so that going forward they would become more of what Christ would have them to be. That is your prerogative. That is your opportunity here even if you are later in life and you have squandered quite a bit. Praise God. Praise

God you can still be light even if you have hid your light under a bushel for a while. Praise be to God. You should walk out of here grateful that your very breath, your very present life, your very existence, is a token, a sure indication that God is not done yet and there is more grace to come.

So this applies to all of us across the board and these characteristics that Paul describes, go back to verse 9, this goodness, this righteousness, this truth that he calls us to, all of this is a result of God's work in our lives. We are expected, commanded and able as a Christian. Let me say it again and shake my head again as we do it: we are able to manifest this kind of life because God has put his Spirit inside us. We have the indwelling Spirit. We have the promise and presence of Christ. We are able to live this way. It is the purpose for which you exist as a Christian is to be like this. And all of a sudden lofty aspirations are set before us and the reason for your existence is clarified and for some of you redefined. You say, "Yes, I'll give myself over to Christ." Whereas the young person in the room, that young adult that says, "I will give my life over to a service of Christ and his word. I'll be that missionary. I'll be that one that goes out. You'll find me being in service to Christ while God gives me breath, and I'll make that a greater priority than what this world has to offer." Which one of you, which ones of you, I'm sure there are many?

But when you consider your present, you consider your partnership, these are the things that it leads you into. It leads you into noble aspirations of life and that's what each one of you should desire, even as you are pursuing it in what seems to be a mundane family life, a mundane job. That's okay. Not everybody has to go into ministry. If the whole body was a hand, where would the eye and the hearing be? That's not the point. The point is that you take the life that God has given you and you give yourself over to the pursuit of goodness, truth and understanding in the midst of whatever that life might be.

Paul concludes, really, on that note. This is so sweet. Third and final point here: consider your purpose. Consider your purpose as we go to verse 10. You know, with a text like this, I understand that you might be sitting there with a sense of saying, "Well, I don't know what comes next. How do I go from here to what you're describing in this text? Where do I go from here?" Well, Paul really anticipates that question in verse 10 as he says there in verse 10, he says, "trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord," or proving by testing, it could be translated, what is pleasing to the Lord. You see, you can develop discernment. We understand that this text comes to us and we've got room to grow. We need to grow and we are not necessarily sure what the way forward in this. Well, what this verse does, it teaches us 2 things: 1, beautiful what this verse teaches us is that you can know with certainty what pleases the Lord in your current circumstances in life. God has appointed your circumstances. God has given you the life that you now have and that means that he intends for you to learn to figure out, to show forth, what it is that pleases him in the midst of the life that he has given to you. He intends for you to learn that, to manifest that. You can know that you are pleasing God in your life. It's not hidden. He is not playing the shell game where what pleases him is one pea under one shell but then there are 3 or 4 others and he kind of shuffles them around and makes it hard for you to

follow. It's not like that. The shell is open, the pea is right there. What pleases the Lord can be known in your life. That's cool.

But there's something else that's involved in this and Paul says, you are trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord, it means that there is going to be a process to it. Learning is a process. You pick up one piece of information as you're studying math and then you build on that and you learn something else. You go back and rehearse something you forgot. There is a learning process to this, but it's not hidden. What pleases God is not secret, but the call in your life is that you would give yourself over to learning, to devoting yourself to a life that is pleasing to the Lord starting with right where you're at today as you sit in that pew and then move forward and let God cultivate. As you read his word, as you seek him in prayer, as you serve him in the body of believers, he will move and direct and it will become clear to you what is pleasing to him with the life that he has given to you, with the giftedness that he has given to you. It's not meant to be secret. What Scripture does, it tells you that there is a part that you play in that. God doesn't just do it for you and you're a passive observer to it. The Bible calls you to evaluate life in light of these principles so that you can follow the right way. So you think, you consider, who are you partners with. You remember, "Oh, that was my former life before Christ. I don't want that. I want to manifest the light of the Lord. I want to learn what pleases the Lord."

So how does this play out? How is it practical? Well, it starts with you approve it, God's will, you approve what pleases God. You affirm it, you strengthen it, how many synonyms do I need to help express it, with your priorities. You have to deal with the question, "What is important to you in life?" Is it your notoriety? Is it your wealth? Is it something else? Is it something human or is your priority, is your defining reason for your existence to return glory to the one who saved you? To manifest and live the life that he has called you to be? You see, and once you establish the direction of that priority, then a lot of other things become clear but you have to think at that deep level that a lot of people don't even want to go to. Scripture tells you to go there. And when your priorities are clear, then you develop discernment and God sanctifies that and blesses that establishment of that heart priority and develops you and grows you in a way that what is presently maybe unclear and uncertain to you, what your next step should be is uncertain about what would please the Lord, over time, he works in a way that that becomes clear so that you know and you've learned and you know what's pleasing to God.

I knew years ago with the direction of my current life that I needed to do something different. I knew because the months were just being squandered in things that were not profitable comparatively speaking. It's not that I was doing anything sinful, my life was not engaged with that which I was most able to do and I knew that my whole life needed to be redirected in direction. And the recognition of that and I didn't know what that meant or where that was going or all of that, but I knew that I had reached the end of my usefulness in where I was at in life. I didn't know what that meant. Didn't know. Kept praying, "God, help me. God, show me. God, direct me." And in the midst of that, the email pops up, "Would you consider coming to Cincinnati to pastor a church?" Ha! Well,

there you go. There's the clarity. I just say that to help you say that even as a growing serious Christian, you come to those times and you say, "I don't know but I know that something more needs to come out of my life than what was there to begin with." So you give yourself over, "Lord, I want to please you. God, you've got to help me. God, the years are going by and time is getting short. Help me! Help me! Help me!" And as you pursue that priority, you learn. You start to know. You grow in your understanding and opportunities come and you say, "Ah, that's it. That's what will please the Lord."

So don't expect it all to happen once and for all. Don't expect it to happen immediately as you're walking out, but devote yourself, beloved, give yourself over. I beg you, I plead with you as those who will one day soon stand before the judgment seat of Christ when no one around here is able to stand with you and it's you before your Lord and he is going to determine the reward that he will give to you throughout eternity. I beg you! Honestly, I beg you to make it your heart desire and your heart priority, "I want to know what pleases the Lord while I've still got time. I want to know because I want to stand before Christ and have him look on me with a smile, as it were, on his face and say, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Master.'" Don't you want to hear him say that? If Christ says that to me, nothing else in this life matters by comparison. If I can just hear him say that, all of life will be worth it.

And that's true for you too. That's what I want for you. That's what Scripture wants for you. That's what God wants for you. That's why it says, "Try to learn what's pleasing to the Lord and then give your life over to it." It's not going to be what the world is offering to you, that cheap substitutes. It may not be that which leads you to notoriety and prosperity but, beloved, try to learn what's pleasing to the Lord. Let your defining moment of existence as you enter into eternity be the Lord Jesus saying, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. I see what you have done with your life. I see the priorities that you made. Enter into the joy of your Master." Hallelujah! That would be great, wouldn't it? Wouldn't it? That moment happens and will happen for those who give themselves over to the right priorities now, who remember what their partnership is, who remember their present compared to their past and give themselves over to the priorities of God.

Beloved, all of these things mean that the Bible has poked its finger right where you live. It has gotten into your kitchen and is arranging the menu for you going forward. It tells you that you can no longer tolerate that disposition you have toward immorality, greed or coarse, filthy talking. Your sin must go because a higher calling is beckoning you to a life that glorifies God now and ends up with you being blessed through all of eternity. That's why you exist. You have a higher calling. You have a better calling and so, beloved, I beg you for the sake of Christ in his name and for your own sake, I beg you to put your sin away. Love Christ with your life, not just with your lips, and settle in your heart as we go to prayer, it's time for your sin to go.

Bow with me in prayer, if you would.

*Our Father, we commend ourselves to you. Thank you for saving us by your grace. Now help us to live by your grace. And for those who have never come to Christ through his*

*blood atonement to be reconciled to you, our Father, may your Holy Spirit lead them to the cross of Christ in repentance and faith and may you greet them with the love of a Father greeting the prodigal on his return home. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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