

A Decisive Approach Toward Sin

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Ephesians 5, verses 11 through 14 is our text for this morning and as we have magnified the King in our songs here this morning, the question becomes how do you respond to this glorious and holy King. What is it that we do in response certainly if there is a King with authority and glory, then it must call forth a response from his people and here we see an aspect of that in our text that we have for this morning. Ephesians 5:11 through 14. Follow along as I read it out of the New American Standard Version where it says,

11 Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; 12 for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. 13 But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. 14 For this reason it says, "Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you."

I'll be candid with you as we start here this morning, this is a little bit of a difficult text. It's not immediately apparent exactly what Paul is saying and so we'll try to work our way through it in a way that opens it up and makes some sense hopefully in the context. But what I want to do is just to set a little bit of a reset, a little bit of the context to help you remember exactly what's going on here. As Paul has expounded on salvation in the early parts of Ephesians, he comes now to the latter chapters and he works out the implications of what it means for our lives and how we are to respond to this salvation that Christ purchased for us with his shed blood on the cross and he says in chapter 5, verses 1 and 2, he says, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma." If you are mindful of your sin, when you have a deep conviction of the wickedness of your own heart and the rebellion of your own life and you're mindful of the fact that Christ suffered on the cross in order to take away your sins in order to reconcile you to God, and that that was the eternal Son of God offering himself up as a sacrifice for you on the cross, then what Paul is saying here in chapter 5 makes perfectly good sense. If someone like Christ has so lovingly redeemed you and saved you, then it should be a moral desire of your heart that you want to be like him and that that would be the right thing to do would be for you to pattern your life and your character and your aspirations after the God who was so gracious to you. That's why Paul says there in chapter 5, verse 1, "be imitators of God." Remember the sacrifice of Christ, how he loved

you and gave himself up as a sacrifice that would turn away the wrath of God from your sin and disobedience and that you enter into full and complete reconciliation to God through the atoning sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Just as God is holy, just as God is pure, then it is incumbent upon you and me as Christians to say, "Okay then, I need to walk further away from sin, further into a life of purity and holiness and sanctification." That's the only right thing to do. But not only is it right, it reflects the aspirations of a true Christian's heart. A person doesn't truly come to Christ unless he wants to be delivered from sin. We come to Christ because not just because we don't want to go to hell, you don't have to be a Christian to not want to go to hell, what is distinct about a true Christian is that they want to be separate from sin, that they want to be purified from it and that's what Christ does for us when he saves us.

So here in Ephesians 5, Paul is giving us an extended section of teaching on Christian purity and if we could summarize it, we could see it perhaps in this way, is that life is serious and we walk in the love, joy and peace of the Holy Spirit but we're mindful that life is serious and that there are consequences to the way that we live. We have been saved out of sin. We're mindful that God will judge the living and the dead and that we will appear before the judgment seat of Christ and receive a reward for the way in which we have lived and we want to maximize that reward. And as I stand here before you and teach the word of God, every one of you, I want your eternal reward to be maximized. I want you to receive the fullest possible reward from God for your Christian living as you could possibly receive and that's what your desire should be too; you should be living with an eye toward the fact that you are going to stand before God and give an account. 2 Corinthians 5:8 through 10 speak of that.

So, what does that mean? Well, it means that you as a Christian have a settled disposition. You have a firm recognition that it is incumbent upon you to put away the remaining vestiges of sin that are still in your life: to turn away from immorality; to turn away from foolish talk and coarse jesting. Look at Ephesians 5:3 and 4. Paul says, "immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you as is proper among the saints. There must be no filthiness and silly talk or coarse jesting which are not fitting but rather a giving of thanks." Here's what I want you to see from that text, beloved, as we're just kind of preparing the background for our text for this morning: there's a certain lifestyle that is proper for those who are Christians. There are things that are fitting and then there are things that are improper and don't match what our position is in Christ and what Paul is saying is that the filthiness of the world, the coarse jesting, the immorality of the world, is something that you should understand and have settled in your heart that you are a sworn enemy against those things.

And we need this instruction, don't we? We're mindful of the fact, we realize that our desires and our heart sometimes tempts us toward evil. We're mindful of the fact that the world knows just exactly how to package sin to make it attractive even to us. We're mindful of the fact, aren't we? Scripture says that Satan is going about like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour and so we realize that while we are, in one sense, we are very secure in Christ, yet in our day to day living we're vulnerable because there are these

weak points that are vulnerable to attack: our own desires; the environment of the world, the spiritual realm of Satan that seeks to discredit Christians and lure them into sin and thus dishonor Christ. We're mindful of all of these things and the question becomes: how is it then that we separate ourselves from sin? How is it that we can establish a life that is firm in its trajectory toward purity? How does that happen?

Well, Paul here in the first 10 verses of Ephesians has shown us that. We have gone over it so many times, but what he's doing now as we come to verses 11 and 14 is that if you think about it like a baseball diamond, Paul is rounding third and heading toward home. He's coming in these four verses, he's coming to his conclusion on this particular section and he's about to bring us to the point where he scores the run, as it were. He brings it to a climax for us to understand exactly what it is that we do and to give us a mindset that conditions us, that entrenches us in a pursuit of holiness, in a pursuit of purity, and if you're a Christian here today, that's what you should want for your life.

What he does in these three verses, these four versus, I should say, verses 11 to 14, is he gives us three final thoughts deal decisively with sin and the first thing that he does here as he lays out three elements of a mind for holiness, the first thing that he does is he shows you 1. How you must deal with sin. If you're taking notes, here in verse 11 he shows you how you must deal with sin and it's important to have a strategy, to have a plan of attack for sin. If you're not thinking through these things, if you've never really seriously dealt with biblical teaching on sanctification, on that process of growing to become more and more like Christ, then if you've never really thought about it, then I'm not surprised to know without you even telling me, that your Christian life is inconsistent, that sometimes things go well and other times you are just so vulnerable to sin and it seems like you have no power over it whatsoever. Well, you know, that comes in part from not really thinking through what Scripture says about sin and dealing with it and there are convictions. There are concrete pillars that must be driven into our character upon which everything else rests and the pillars of holiness are laid out for us here in verses 11 through 14.

Now, Paul has considered the consequences of sin. Look back at verse 5 and 6 with me, again, just by way of reminder, he says, "Know that no immoral or impure or covetous man has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God." He says, "Know," in verse 6, "the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience." And so as we're starting to realize, we say, "For unbelievers, the consequences of sin are massive." There are eternal consequences for sinners and that their love for sin and the things that they pursue lead them into eternal destruction. You say to yourself, "Well, thank God I've been delivered from that." Well, yes that's right. Praise God for his mercy in your life. Absolutely, but carry it through and work it through another step or two and realize, "Okay, I've been delivered from the eternal penalty of sin, well, what I want now is I want to be delivered from the power of sin. I want to be more and more separated from sin in my life," that should be a conviction of yours. That should be one of the deepest desires of your heart. "I want to be like Christ. That means that I don't want to be marked by recurring patterns of sin." That's the only right thing for you to think if you're a Christian.

Now what Paul does here is he, having shown us our responsibility to live differently, he's now giving his closing argument. He's giving his closing instruction on what that looks like and notice in verse 11 he tells you exactly how to deal with sin in a Spirit inspired brevity that is easy to see and remember. Verse 11, writing as a command, this is not optional for us. It is not optional for you to decide whether or not you will deal with sin. If you're a Christian, God commands you. God as King, exercises his royal prerogative over your soul and says, "This is how you must live. This must be the formative desires of your heart." What does he say, verse 11? Remember, we're reading the word of God written to his people. He says, "Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness but instead even expose them." Here's what I want you to see: sometimes the most powerful principles of Scripture are profoundly simple and what Paul has done here is he has given us a twofold command. There is a twofold way in which you should think about sin. First of all, notice there is a contrast, he says, "Do not participate in these unfruitful deeds but instead even expose them." Just as a general observation, what I want you to see is this: that there is a negative and there is a positive command here. There should be in your mind a twofold approach to sin: one that says, "I don't participate in it"; and secondly, less perhaps, less often considered, you have a strengthened resolve to expose it.

What is Paul saying here? On the negative side he says, "Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness." In other words, refuse them. Have it settled in your mind that whenever sin comes, whenever temptation presents itself to you, whether you're prone to being a gossip or a cheat or a liar or whether it's in the realm of sensual immorality being presented to you, whatever the area of sin is that you are particularly vulnerable to, you have it settled in your mind that the principle is established, "That is not a realm for me to enter. I refuse it. I reject it." And it's not enough simply to say, "Well, that's wrong but, look, we're all weak and we all fall into sin and so..." And you just kind of temper the commands of Scripture with a sense that says, "I'm going to acknowledge some defeat before I even get into it." You make excuses before you even enter the battle. You plan your escape strategy before the bullets even start flying. What kind of Christian soldier is that that says, "I admit defeat before I even move forward"? No, that's not how we deal with sin. That's not how we think about it. We think about it biblically. We think about it from God's perspective and what God says is, "Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness. Refuse them. Make no room in your heart for it. Make yourself a sworn enemy of these unfruitful things that Paul has been discussing earlier in the text, the sins that you know you particularly struggle with. Don't make room for them. Refuse them." Say, "This has no legitimate place in my life whatsoever," even if it's sins that you enjoy, particularly if it's sins that you enjoy the darkness of it. Well look, Scripture says, "Don't participate in that. Don't you realize that those deeds cannot be separated from the way that God views them and the way that God views them is that those who continually practice those deeds will be the objects of his eternal wrath?" There's not room for you as a Christian to think about sin in a way that accommodates it in your life. There should be settled disposition that says, "I refuse that."

Why do you refuse it? Look back at verse 11: it's unfruitful. There is no good in it. There is nothing profitable in it and so what Paul is saying here is that your mindset as a

Christian is to stop making room for those sins in your approach to life. It means when your mind starts to go there you say, "No, I can't even think that way." When the people who lead you into those sins come in you say, "Do you know what, guys? I've got to go. I'm checking out. You guys lead me into darkness and I don't want that in my life. I'm not going to participate in it." It's that settled so that it's not just a general sense that sin is bad and whatever, it actually starts to form settled convictions in your heart that drive the way that you live life day to day. That's it. Then once you have settled that and that's clear in your mind, Paul then goes on and gives this positive command to increase the pursuit of godliness in your life.

Look at verse 11 here. This is very interesting, very challenging and it's very helpful. Scripture so often does this, it gives us not only a negative command but a positive thing to pursue as well, and he says, "Don't participate in them." It has the idea of stop participating in them, "but instead even expose them." What is he saying here? Well, there are couple of things that we need to have in mind and this really, as you understand this, it really starts to give you a sense of the nobility and the exalted nature of being a Christian and living the Christian life because in the dark realm that envelops the world, in the realm where Satan operates with his lies and his deceptions and his murderous desires and where those who belong to his kingdom carry them out, all of the darkness of that, well, what's true about you and me as Christians is that our lives expose that for what it is. The teaching of God's word exposes it and so also the sanctified lives of ordinary Christians like you and me expose what is true, what is honorable, what is holy by contrast with that which is dark and sinful.

Your sanctified life, and this should just fill you with a sense of aspiration if you're a Christian, your sanctified life without you even most of the time even being aware of it, your sanctified life exposes the wickedness of sin because it creates a contrast with the way that the world lives. It exposes a contrast with the way that sinners live and it has an amazing effect the Scripture teaches. When you are living a godly life and you're not trying to put yourself on a platform, you know, and for many of you, you're not trying to parade your godliness on social media or anything like that, you're just trying to live a humble, godly, Christian life. Well, what I want you to see from this passage is that that godly life convicts sinners around you of their guilt and pollution because the light, as it were, that emanates from your life maybe in your workplace where you receive a lot of guff and a lot of criticism and a lot of mocking for being a Christian, well, that's simply a reaction to the fact that your light is in conflict with the darkness of where they exist and what their realm is and so it is creating, the light is meeting the darkness and is exposing it. Sometimes that exposure comes as you're simply a silent witness through your attitudes and conduct and it just has that effect on people. At other times, it's going to be when you give a verbal expression to the truth and speak on matters of righteousness in the realm of responsibility and influence that God has given to you. Whatever it is, there is this total package of living and verbal witness that exposes sin for the wicked, dark realm that it is.

What Paul is saying is, he says, look at verse 8 with me, he says, "You are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light." Let it be your pattern of life, your pursuit of life, to

manifest the truth and holiness of God that has taken root, has taken captive all of your affections and priorities. He says, "Walk that way," and now what he's saying is, "When you walk that way, there is going to be an exposure that takes place of sin and darkness all around you." It's fascinating to realize that this happens without us even thinking about it, and what I want you to see is that we're not neutral in the battle. It's not that we're simply passive and we simply stay back and we try not to do anything. There is an element of attack in a true Christian's life that works to expose sin and darkness. Privately, we don't compromise. We don't participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness and yet we are mindful that when we are with others, we are making the truth known through the way that we live and the things that we say. So all of a sudden you realize that ordinary people like you and me, all of a sudden we are on the front lines of a spiritual battle that is exposing what is true in contrast to what is false. We are exposing what is right and holy in contrast to that which is sinful and demonic.

Paul says, "You be mindful of what your life represents. You're a child of light. You're a child of God. You're a child of Christ and as that, as a representative of his, be mindful of what you're carrying. Be mindful, as it were, of the uniform that you wear. Of the badge that is on your life, the badge of Christ, the badge of his redemption." And all of a sudden you start to see crystallizing in your mind before you, "Wow, there is a real significant spiritual purpose to my life. Even if I'm not somebody that's upfront, I'm just kind of going through life quietly in a quiet life of Christianity," listen, even in that, there is this representative capacity that you hold and, beloved, Scripture says it is a powerful witness. That's why Jesus says you are the salt of the earth, you're the light of the world in Matthew 5:14 to 16. Salt has a preservative capacity. It has a preservative effect. It is a retardant against decay. Light exposes darkness. Light and darkness cannot simultaneously exist. So this inevitable contrast that your life represents sheds light on the works of darkness. It exhibits the true nature of sin as vile and destructive. So Paul says, "Don't participate but instead even expose them." We recognize, "Wow, this is what God has called me to."

As we proclaim the Gospel, as we evangelize the lost, all of this is just multiplying in its effect and so I like to talk this way, you ask yourself the question: why do you exist? Why am I here? What is the purpose of your life? In part, Ephesians 5:11 has given you a very clear direction as to the purpose of your existence. Your existence is not to follow the pursuits of your fallen desires and into the sins of the world. That's not why you exist. You exist instead to be one that exposes that sin, that rebukes it with your life and with your words, with your lips, and so we are mindful that this is the purpose of our existence. There is a spiritual realm and we're on the front lines of the battle. So how do you deal with it? You deal with it by refusing sin as a matter of principle in your life and embracing the responsibility to be an agent of exposure of the unfruitful deeds of darkness. That's how you deal with it. You have those convictions settled in your mind.

Now, that leads us to a second point here this morning: why you must deal with sin. Point number one was how you must deal with sin, secondly, Paul addresses why you must deal with sin and I have to tell you, I love verse 12. I love Ephesians 5:12 because it shows us that there is no room in our Christian lives for the sins of our flesh and

understanding this biblically, just gives us the understanding and the strength and the motivation that we need to engage the battle because, look, I understand, you're like me, you get weary with sin and you're mindful that you fall and you stumble from time to time. Sometimes it seems like often and if you spend any time in serious prayer and confessing sin and as you're pursuing holiness, it just seems like you become aware of more and more corruption in your life and it weighs on you. Well, what you need as you deal with that and what fuels your motivation to work through that and to trust even more in the work of Christ and to appeal to God to cleanse you and to help you, well, what helps you is understanding why you are engaged in that struggle in the first place.

Why is it that we go through the spiritual effort to resist sin? Well, Paul lays it out for us here in verse 12, he says, why is it that you don't participate? Why is it that you expose them? Look at verse 12, he says, "for." He is given his reason here. He is explaining it, "because, here's why you live this way. Here is why you engage the effort. Here's why you don't just simply drift along with the stream of culture and the stream of society." Here's why a church doesn't cater to the desires of unsaved people in order to try to increase their numbers. All of this is tied together. Verse 12, he says, "For it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret." Why is it that you must deal with sin? First of all, sin is shameful. Sin is shameful.

Look at it there in verse 12. He says, "It is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret." We stand in conviction against the depraved nature of our world. Why? Because what animates the world and its desires, what drives our society, what drives our entertainment, what drives our politics, it's wrong and it's shameful. It's a disgrace. It's a dishonor. And look, what you and I as Christians as we look on that, what our response is that we don't justify sin in our lives by saying, "Well, everyone does it," and the ungodliness of the world becomes an excuse for compromising with ungodliness in your own life. That's not the right perspective. You see, you and I, we don't judge ourselves in comparison with what other men are doing. That is the quicksand that sinks down into hell. You don't want to think that way. You don't want to approach life that way and say, "Well, what's acceptable to me I'll determine by being just a little bit better by the world around me." That's foolish. That's ungodly, carnal thinking. So you don't say, "Well, I don't get as drunk as the guy next to me does. I don't get as drunk as often as he does so I'm better than him." That's not the point at all. No, you come and you say, "What does God think about all of this? What does Scripture say about it," and what Scripture says is that all of that stuff is a disgrace. It is a sinful dishonor against its Creator. It is indecent. It is dishonorable.

So our conviction, our approach is, "Do you know what? The people in the world may live that way but I understand from God's word that that is a shameful disgraceful way to live. It is a dishonoring way to even think. So I will have no part in it and it's because it is shameful that I will have no part in it." And understand what Paul is doing here, remember he's building up and reinforcing the reasons that you know how you must deal with sin. You say, "This is disgraceful, therefore I refuse the way of the world for my standard of living. Therefore I will live a life that is opposed to it and has the effect of exposing the wickedness." Why? Why do we refuse it? Why do we reject it? Why do we

rebuke it? Refuse and rebuke, that's what I was trying to get to. Why do we refuse and rebuke it? Why? Because it's shameful. All of this worldly sin and the continual downward spiral, it's a vortex of shame and because it's like that, then I'm going to refuse and rebuke it.

Now look, I understand knowing even from some personal conversations that I've had with you in recent days, I understand that that makes you unpopular. I understand that it subjects you to ridicule you, but what we must do, what you and I must do is we must go to Scripture and let it soak into our minds so that your resolve is unaffected by it and that your personal conviction and disposition is unmoved. It is firm against it so that you are able to stand against the ever-growing tide that would try to carry you out to the sea of ungodliness. You say, "No, I'm not cast loose here. I'm not some loose piece of seaweed on the beach that can be carried out with the tide. No, I'm anchored like a lighthouse here. I'm not moving. I'm unmovable on this conviction."

What will come of that? What happens as a result? What can you expect to flow from life as a result of that? Well, we see that sin is shameful but there is an effect that it has. Look at verse 13 and this is where Paul starts to speak in very compressed language and it takes some effort to unpack what we think he is getting at. He says, "But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light." Why is it that you must deal with sin? Sin is shameful. What Paul is saying here in verse 13 is that that kind of separation is enlightening. It has an instructive effect. It has a convicting result on the world around us. Paul is showing us what happens when we live in obedience to Scripture and what he's saying in verse 13 is that, "Your faithful Christian life exposes evil by creating a contrast with it." When people who are in darkness see your faithful life, it exposes the sinfulness of their own life. When you show a Christ centered approach to life, it exposes the fact that they are not of like affection. It shows them that they are in love with themselves and they are in love with sin when they see that you're not like that. The contrast can't be helped. What happens when you walk into a dark room and flick on the light switch? Yeah, the light comes on but everything that's in the room is made visible as a result and you can see the chaos that is in an unkempt room when a light is turned on. Well, when a Christian living a godly humble life steps into a realm of an unsaved person's life, it's like shining light on the fact that their life is ungodly. It is unrighteous as they see the contrast between your life and theirs. Your life makes visible the sin in their own life. Your purity teaches other people about sin. Your life becomes an object lesson in God's holiness.

As I was preparing this, it reminded me of a very clear illustration of how this works and you can relate to this. It reminds me of a friend that I have, he's now in pastoral ministry, he wasn't at the time, but his wife was at a secular social gathering with some unsaved women and these women were crass in their conversation and they were speaking badly about their husbands. They were saying bad things, "My husband doesn't do this. You should know what my husband does in secret." They were just running down their husband in a very ungodly way. Well, you expect ungodly women to say ungodly things, I get that, but she's in the midst of this conversation. Something very interesting happened. Without directly addressing or rebuking their speech, she simply spoke well of

her husband to them. "You know, my husband is a loving godly man." This wasn't Nancy, by the way. This truly was someone else. Not trying to give myself a backhanded compliment here. No, this is somebody else that almost none of you know. She said, "I love my husband. I respect my husband. He's a godly leader in our family and he cares for us and I appreciate what my husband does." Wow. The women that she was with felt the sting of her conversation. They were rebuked inside by what she said. Do you know how you knew? It's because they stopped talking that way. Her simple Christian godly speech restrained their evil for a temporary time, I get that, but it obviously exposed to them the ungodliness of what they were saying and what they were doing. They felt the sting of disgrace in their lives so much that they had to speak differently while she was in their presence.

That's what this does. This is what Paul is talking about here is that when, go back to the text, look at the text with me, chapter 5, verses 11, 12 and 13, that when you are mindful not to participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, you say, "I'm not joining in in that conversation. I may be in the minority here but I am not going to talk that way. I will not give my tongue over ungodliness. I don't care how funny and everybody else thinks it is. I'm not going to have a part in that." Instead, even expose them. I suppose that my friend's wife could have said, "You women shouldn't talk that way." That would be one way to expose it. There was a different way that she did and she wasn't even trying to this at the time, but she exposed it simply with her godly life and said, "I'm not going to participate in that because the way these women are talking is a disgrace." And maybe for some of you women, just on a side point, you should realize that it is disgraceful to run down your husband in the presence of other people. Don't talk that way. You speak well about your husbands. You husbands, speak well about your wives in the presence of others. Be mindful of that. We should affirm our spouses and deal with their difficulties in private.

But in verse 13 here, getting back to the flow of Paul's thought, we'll have more to say about marriage in a few weeks when we get to the end of this chapter. Paul says, "All things become visible when they are exposed by the light," and what we see here is the way that godly living has that effect. Light, godliness, holiness shines and the rats of darkness start to scurry in response. Sometimes your godly life will just be a temporary restraint on evil. I understand those women went back and started back up once my friend was gone. That's okay. I mean it's not okay that they do that, but the fact that her influence was only temporary on them does not diminish the force of what Paul is saying here. Their sin was made visible by the light of her godly life and whenever we are living in the midst of ungodly people, understand that that's the effect that's happening, that's going on. Maybe it won't be verbally recognized. Maybe there won't be anything consciously different but you are strengthened in your commitment and conviction to pursue holiness when you say, "Scripture says this is the effect that I have. This is the effect that godliness has therefore I want to pursue it. I want to make things visible that need to come out of the darkness."

Other times and I've spoken of this, how it affected me in times past before I was a Christian, other times, there will be such a convicting force of your godly life that the

sinner will be compelled as God works on his heart through the word of God and the echo of your godly life reinforcing scriptural principles, that it becomes an instrument in the hands of the Holy Spirit to turn them to Christ and it's not just a temporary restraining. They see their sin and they say, "I need a Savior also." As the Holy Spirit uses your words and your example, some sinners will actually turn to Christ and then really and fully in the greatest extent, darkness becomes light because one who belonged to darkness God has now transferred into the kingdom of light through faith in Christ.

So why do we do this? Well, because why do we pursue this life even though it brings us opposition and spiritual struggle? Why? Because sin is shameful. It's disgraceful and also we realize that a sanctified life has an enlightening impact around us and we love that. We want that. We want our life to have that kind of testimony. Christ who is the light of the world stepped into our lives and drove out darkness and we say, "Oh God, if you would just let me have a residual echoing effect upon others of what Christ did to me. Christ came to me and saved me and drove out the darkness in my soul, filled me with the Holy Spirit. I get the big picture of that. Well Lord, just start to use me. Start to use us in like manner." And Scripture says the way that that happens is when you are refusing evil and committed to rebuking it with your life. So the word of God at work in a sanctified life illuminates the truth about sin and leads some to repentance.

Now, you and I both know that not everyone responds that way, that some resist, some mock, some criticize, some begin to hate us as a result. Well, do you know what? And they'll blame you for it. They'll say, "You holier than thou person. You Jesus freak." Understand what's going on there. Understand what's happening. It's not because you are sinfully self-righteous in those times, I'm presuming the best about you, it's not because you're sinfully self-righteous that men reject that, that men turn their back on the light and run back into darkness as well. Look over at John 3, the Gospel of John 3. This just helps us understand the other side. We've said that on some it will have a convicting impact that will even bring them to Christ. We understand that not everyone will respond that way. Why is that? Is it because of some failure in your life? No. No. Why is it that men reject the light? John 3:19, speaking with the same light and darkness motif, light and darkness metaphor, talking about how the light exposes darkness in a way that echoes what Paul is saying in Ephesians 5, John 3:19, "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed."

They love sin rather than holiness. They love darkness rather than light. And that which comes with an exposing effect upon them, they react against. They resist it. They reject it. They turn away. Why? Is it because they just don't understand? No, it's a moral dilemma. It's a moral problem with them. The reason that some of you are still resisting Christ and the Gospel is because you love your sin and you don't want to give it up. So understand what you're doing. You're loving darkness rather than light and ultimately what you are saying with your life is that, "I prefer eternal judgment and separation from God in hell. I prefer that rather than forsaking my sin and coming to Christ in repentance." Wow. Really? Is that what you want to do? Is that really what you want? God brought you here

today, maybe over the live stream, to graciously invite you one more time out of the darkness. One more time to say, "Sin is offensive and disgraceful."

God's wrath comes upon the sons of disobedience and when God says that, he's not playing games. He's not bluffing. It's not like he's playing a card game in trying to make you think he's got a better hand than what he does. No. No. No. No. No, God has a strong and settled wrath against sin and again sinners and yet in his grace, he offers you through his word today free and complete forgiveness. Simply repent and come to Christ for salvation. Nothing restrains you. There is nothing in God that is keeping you back. The only reason you don't come is because you love your sin rather than the light. Put it aside. Turn away from your sin. Come to Christ for salvation while there is time. The word of God has exposed the sin and darkness in your life today. I know that. Your response should not be to put your fingers in your ears and say, "I'm not listening." Your response should be one of a broken heart that says, "Christ, thank you for your mercy. I receive you now. I lay aside the weapons of my rebellion."

So Paul has shown us how to deal with sin: refuse and rebuke it. Why is it that we deal with sin? Because sin is shameful and that godliness has an enlightening impact on those around. Now, go back to Ephesians 5 and returning the focus to us as Christians here gathered together as the people of God today, what's the final thing that we should see about it? Well, Paul now calls for a response. Christian, we're talking to you now. We're talking to you now. Maybe in your spiritual lethargy, maybe you have drifted into some indifference or patterns of sin in attitude or word or deed. Point 3 here is: what you must do now. What you must do now. In light of everything that Paul has said in the first 13 verses of Ephesians 5, he's now bringing it to a climax. He's drawing all of this together in a concluding way and what he does here in verse 14 is he calls you to obedience.

Look at chapter 5, verse 14, it says, "For this reason it says, 'Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you.'" This is a quotation of some sorts that Paul is making but scholars really have no idea what the original source is. You see, the verse says, "It says," and then there is a quotation that follows. Some scholars have tried to attach it to passages in Isaiah that have some loose parallels. Others say maybe this was a non-inspired, nonbiblical Christian hymn that Paul was referring to. They really don't know. But what we want to see here for today is this, look at what it says there, "Awake, sleeper." Paul is calling someone to wake up. When you say "awake" it suggests that someone is slumbering.

Now, some teachers think that this is a call to repentance upon unbelievers and that it's the unbeliever who is being told to awake and arise from the dead and Christ will shine on you. Well, there is truth to that. You could make a Gospel appeal using language like that and what Paul has been talking about in the prior couple of verses is the effect that a godly life has on unbelievers. That's not an unreasonable way to view the passage, but you know, and this is really important by way of application, this is important for us as Christians to get this right: I don't think that Paul in verse 14 is issuing a call to repent to unbelievers. We need to understand why. First of all, this is a letter written to the church. Paul, chapter 1, verse 1, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus to the saints who are in

Ephesus." He's writing to Christians, generally speaking, and watch this, stay with me because this really does have a lot to do with you and me: all through the passage leading up to here he has been addressing Christians who have been happy to accommodate sin in their lives. He said in verse 22 of chapter 4, he said, "You laid aside the old self which is corrupted in accordance with the lust of deceit." Verse 25, chapter 4, he said, "Lay aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you." Verse 28, "He who steals must steal no longer. Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth." Verse 32, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other just as God in Christ has also forgiven you." He's talking to Christians. That's really important. Stay with me, would you? I know you are, thank you. That would be a better way to say it. Thank you for staying with me. I'm so glad. He's writing to Christians. Chapter 5, verse 1, "Be imitators of God as beloved Christians, just as Christ loved you and gave himself up for us." He's talking to Christians. "Immorality must be not named among you as proper among the saints." He's talking to Christians. "Let no one deceive you with empty words." He's talking to Christians. Verse 8, "You were formerly darkness but now you are light in the Lord." He's talking to Christians. All through this passage he has been talking to Christians and rebuking and correcting the Christians of that time, the audience of his letter, correcting them because they had accommodated sin in their lives and he is calling them out of that. "Stop living in this disobedient way."

It makes no sense, honestly, to think that his concluding, climactic statement at the end of verse 14 is now going to be a call upon unbelievers. That's totally foreign to the context. This is the grand finale of this section on purity and all of a sudden he's not talking to the same people he was talking to before? That doesn't make any sense. No, no, Ephesians 5 is a call to Christians like you and me to set aside – watch this – to set aside spiritual sluggishness. It is Christians that he is calling upon to rise to holiness. God's word today is calling you as a believer in Christ to put your life in order, to recognize the ungodly patterns of thinking and life that you have accepted and compromised on and to come out of them. "Wake up," he says. "Stop slumbering." He has given so many commands in so many different areas and he comes to this concluding thought and he says, "For this reason, because of everything that I have been saying through this whole section of the letter, for this reason, I am going to quote a source and say, 'Wake up, sleeper. Rise from the dead. Come up out of your spiritual mediocrity and embrace and obey the instruction of the Lord that has been laid upon you in these prior two chapters.'"

I agree with S. Lewis Johnson who said this and I quote, "He is telling them that if their lives are not characterized by this purity of which he is talking, they are sleeping morally and they should awake and arise from the dead and Christ will give them light. It is a promise that as we, by the grace of God and the enablement of God, get down upon our knees and ask him to deliver us from the failures of our Christian life, we have the assurance that God will undertake for us and we shall be given light." In other words, the convicting force of this entire passage should be coming upon our hearts in a way that says, "Lord, I don't want to be a spiritually mediocre Christian any longer. I, myself, repent, Father, of the accumulated sin and indifference that has marked my life. I awake from that in response to this teaching from God's word. I come up. I rise out of it. I want to move forward now in my pursuit of purity because the commands of God have shaken

me out of my spiritual slumber. I want to shake off the dust of worldliness that has accumulated on me and start pursuing this life that Paul has laid out here."

Scripture here is saying, "Christian, wake up. Christian, come up. Christian, get out of that disobedient pattern that you have fallen into. You, yourself, repent and rise, as it were, and you have the promise that Christ will bless you and help you and enable you as you do." Christians can be asleep without even knowing it. Chances are, beloved, if you are not engaged in a repeated pattern of examining your own heart, if you look at your spiritual life, just be honest with yourself and say, "Do you know what? I can't remember the last time I ever even confessed a sin. I can't remember the last time that I actually made a conscious choice for holiness instead of obedience." Well, if that somehow resembles your spiritual life, let me tell you, you're asleep. You're slumbering. You're a soldier in battle and yet you are asleep at the post and you need to wake up. If you look at your heart and you see anything other than the fact that the pursuit of holiness is a great priority, it is the defining priority of my life, if you call yourself a Christian and yet that is not true, you need to wake up, sleeper. You need to rise from the dead and you can do so with the assurance and the promise of the blessing of God on his people. That Christ will shine on you. That the light that is truth and the holiness of Christ as you awaken, as you stir the strings of repentance on the violin of your life, you can be mindful, you can be confident that there will be the blessing of God on you as you do and that your life will become more of this testifying influence that you were saved to become.

So the question is: what will you decide? Will you wake up? Will you refuse sin and even rebuke it with your lips and life? Do you know what this passage lays out? Do you know what the totality of everything Paul has said in Ephesians 4 and 5 lays before us as Christians? I know that you're like me and you get discouraged by the ever encroaching darkness of the world and you see the progress of it. You see some of it even in your own families and it grieves you. Do you know what this is saying to you? You can walk in holiness in a dark world. You can. You can live a godly life despite how dark it is around you. Christ did. Christ lived a perfectly sinless life of obedience to God while he walked in the midst of sinners on this cursed sod of ours and it did not compromise his holiness one bit to do so. You can too. You can walk in holiness in this dark world. Christ indwells us through his Spirit and, beloved, he will bless you. He will honor you. He will help you as you take a decisive approach toward sin.

Let's pray together, shall we?

Father, we ask for grace to see sin in the same way that you do. Help us to refuse and to rebuke this evil world and its temptations. Use us to shine light and point others to our gracious Savior. Father, work by your Spirit in the hearts of those who are here who don't know you. Convict them of sin, righteousness and judgment. By your Spirit, break the chains of sin on their lives that they might rise, come forth and come to Christ in repentance and faith saying that, "After all of these years, Lord Jesus, I'm sick of sin. I ask you to save. Make me your own based on your obedient life and your shed blood on the cross. I come to God through Christ for salvation and the forgiveness of my sins." Yes, Lord, do that work and help us who are your people. Some of us have been

slumbering, O God, forgive us. Help us to rise ourselves and to come follow Christ with renewed purpose for the day and the age and the circumstances to which you have appointed us as we stand before you today. Yes, Father, answer all these prayers exceeding abundantly beyond all that we could ask or think. In the name of Christ Jesus we pray. Amen.

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