

Walking as Children of Light in a Sex-Crazed Society **Eph. 5:3-14**

We live in a sex-crazed culture. You know that. I could give you lists and stats and examples and stories, but what's the point? It's all around us in our crime reports, music, movies and advertising. Travel the world and you will see examples of the old adage – sex sells.

This should come as no surprise to the saved. When a society turns away from God and the living water He is, something must fill the void. Inevitably, it's sexual immorality, in one form or another. For the unbeliever who remains a slave to sinful urges, the desire is too strong and the temptations are too many.

Every Christian with an adult conversion knows this rather painfully.

Where ninety-nine other sins might fall away easily, sexual sin does not. This is understandable because God created sex, sexual organs and sexual pleasure. In the context of committed, monogamous marriage between one man and one woman, sexual attraction and pleasure is a gift of God's common grace and grounded in creation, not the Fall. So, there's something very right about sex.

What happens of course is the enemy comes along and perverts it, using the world as his instrument to entice our fallen flesh. He's no respecter of persons, age or religious upbringing. I've heard of men who started sinning sexually as six years old looking at catalogs for women's clothing!

Where many a Christian might not be tempted by a hundred other things, sexual temptations remain, likely in some form until our dying breath. Passion may decline as we age but the mind is still able to sin in a thousand ways.

During a men's retreat many years ago, we heard about a reconciliation ministry that deals with sexual sin among believers, mostly among church leaders, pastors and elders. This ministry receives phone calls for help every single week. Not surprising. But this part is – the dominate age group of Christians that contact this ministry is 45-55 years old. Upon further reflection, we can understand why this is the case.

The appeal of forbidden water and stolen bread can be terribly strong to our sin nature. That something or someone is off limits makes us want it even more. So instead of submitting to God's boundaries, waiting on His timing and trusting in His plan, mankind has made a god out of sexual pleasure and worshipped this god with reckless abandon. Abortion, homosexuality and transgenderism, along with pornography, fornication and adultery are all acts of pagan worship at the altar of this false god.

With lost, ungodly media leading the way, America is a dark place morally, and sadly even believers are numb to it. It's time for all believers to wake up, repent and let Christ shine through us into this dark place of our society called sexual immorality.

To help us do this, we turn to Ephesian 5:3-14 (NASB, 1995).

³ But sexual immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be mentioned among you, as is proper among saints; ⁴ and *there must be no* filthiness or foolish talk, or vulgar joking, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. ⁵ For this you know with certainty, that no sexually immoral or impure or greedy person, which amounts to an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

⁶ *See that* no one deceives you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. ⁷ Therefore do not become partners with them; ⁸ for you were once 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, righteousness, and truth), ¹⁰ as you try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Do not participate in the useless 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.”

This passage answers three important questions about walking in the light while living in a dark world of sexual sins.

First, what does it mean to walk as children of light?

Answer, we abstain with sexually impure speech and replace it with holy gratitude (vv.3-4).

Paul lists out six sins. It's likely all of them are sexual in nature, given the context. He will later refer to them as deeds of darkness and the things done in secret.

The first three are typical of people living for self-indulgent pleasures instead of true love.

1. “Immorality” is *porneia* in Greek, covering all sexual activity outside the holy boundaries of marriage. This includes fornication (sex before marriage), adultery (sex outside of the marriage covenant), pornography, prostitution, etc. It echoes the 7th commandment, “You shall not commit adultery.”
2. “Impurity” describes dirty thoughts and actions associated with sexual sin; the unmentionables that are paraded in America’s streets and pulsating through our fiber optic cables and WIFI airwaves.
3. “Greed” in this immediate context is unrestrained sexual lust or coveting or activity where the greedy think others exist for their gratification. Greed echoes the 10th commandment, “You shall not covet what belongs to your neighbor.”

The next three renounce sinful speech, likely of sexual nature or connotation. It's not a new list but a continuation of the first set. If the above rule your heart and life, these next three will come out of your mouth, for what fills the heart flows from the mouth.

4. “Filthiness” is dirty jokes, sexually suggestive speech, lewd comments, etc.
5. “Silly talk” is foolish talk – moros in Greek – dull, stupid chatter, silly twaddle, again with a sexual slant.
6. “Coarse jesting” is literally “well-turning” or versatile words, coarse or crass wit on display. It’s taking an innocent comment or situation and being adept at turning it to something else through crude or coarse joking. Buffoonery, sexual innuendo, locker room talk, vulgar wit and double entendre, a phrase open to two interpretations, with one usually being risqué or vulgar.

This second list is often true of unsaved youth, esp. high school and college age males and females. It’s a badge of honor among the lost to see how vulgar they can be.

Let it not even be named among you Christian! Paul goes beyond “don’t do these things” to “don’t even talk about them.” We must diligently avoid detailed and prolonged conversation about the sexual sins of others because this can create an atmosphere in which they are tolerated, accepted and promoted. It can also become a means of temptation to our own hearts.

Instead, we should replace that kind of speech with holy thankfulness that encourages others to see God’s good gifts in all of life.

Someone has well said – thanksgiving is almost a synonym for the Christian life.

Andrew T. Lincoln, writing for Word Biblical Commentary, said this: “Behind the contrast of these six vices with thanksgiving lies a fundamental issue. What is acknowledged as ultimate – God or ... sensual gratification?”

Second, why should believers walk as children of light?

Paul mentions four reasons why we should walk as offspring of Light.

1. Because deeds of darkness are not proper or fitting among holy ones (v.3 and v.4). These are the very things we have been set apart from!
2. Because those who practice such things will experience the wrath of God (vv.5-7). You know this deep down. You really, really know this, no one who habitually lives an unrepentant life of sexual sin has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no antinomian deceive you with empty words of cheap grace. Let no preacher deceive you with a two-tier Christianity made up of believers and disciples. Let no one trick you into thinking that submission to the Lordship of Christ is optional. There is no salvation without repentance and no inheritance in the kingdom without submission to the King. Word commentary once again: “Those in bondage to their sexual appetites are not those over whom Christ and God rule.” The work of God’s grace breaks the habitual patterns of sin and we are commanded not to think otherwise. If the pursuit and abiding desire of one’s life is sexual sin, that person gives irrefutable evidence of being unconverted.

3. Because your nature has changed (v.8).

That garbage is the old man, your former life, your B.C. life. But now you are by nature Light in the Lord! I Thess. 5:4-6 says “But you, brethren, are not in darkness ... for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.” Not only do you live in the light, you are light.

As the goodness of the juicy orange draws attention to the tree, so our goodness, righteousness and truth will draw attention to God as the Source.

4. Because it pleases the Lord (v.10). This one reason would be enough by itself! Those who have been saved from darkness to light want to know what pleases their Lord.

Third, then what do we do about the darkness?

Don't go there (v.11a). Shun the deeds, not the doers. Then expose it for what it is (v.11b-12). These deeds are shameful and disgraceful even to speak openly about the things that take place in secret and need to be labeled and called out as such but even then, in a way that is discreet and guarded. As Expositor's Commentary puts it, “What has been done in the dark is best kept dark.”

So how do we “expose them” if we aren't to even talk about them? By bringing the Light of Christ to bear on it (v.13). We expose them by our life in the light, letting the light of Christ shine through us and showing them up for what they really are. Word Commentary: “As believers refuse to join in evil actions and display a different quality of life, they cast their illuminating beam into the dark recesses of the surrounding society and will invariably show up its immoral practices for what they are.”

If someone is bashing marriage in general and his wife in particular, you can expose this sin by extolling marriage, praising your wife, loving her well and showing appreciation of her in front of others.

The light of Christ will show sin as sin. It becomes obvious really “for everything that becomes visible is light.”

In v.8 believers are called light, so “everything” here must refer to everyone who comes out of darkness into the light, to every believer. This is what happened to these Ephesian believers who were saved out of a permissive and immoral society. Everyone who becomes exposed or manifest by the light of Christ in a saving way is light from then on out by the transformation of their nature.

Here's the helpful J. B. Phillips translation: “It is even possible (after all, it happened with you!) for light to turn the thing it shines upon into light also.”

So the first half of v.13 calls us to live in such a way that our light shines on the deeds of people in darkness and exposes them for what they really are, with the hope that the exposure will be used of God to show that person the nature of their actions and to respond to the light, so that the second half of v.13 is speaking of those dark people who become light themselves!

Remember your own rescue from darkness (v.14).

Verse 14 is a poetic, metrical triplet with a rhythm usually associated with religious chants. It is believed to be a fragment of an early church Christian hymn or liturgy, likely familiar to Paul's readers, and based mostly on Isa. 60:1 ("Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you"). It was used at the baptism of new converts! Imagine you are about to be baptized and the congregation sings or chants to you: Awake, Sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.

What would be the purpose of that? It would be a reminder of what has already happened and a challenge for your entire Christian life. You have been rescued from darkness, so awake from the sleep of sin! You are now light in the Lord, so shine!

And if an unsaved family member is attending your baptism, this chant becomes a call to all sleepers to come to Christ, out of darkness and out of sleep. Jesus said, "I have come as light into the world, that everyone who believes in Me may not remain in darkness."

What do you get when you mix a fading knowledge of God and Scripture with empty hearts and lives, plus a worldly, Satan-controlled system that promotes pleasure of the body over pleasure of the soul in an educational setting that says we are highly developed animals and there's no moral absolutes? Today's America.

The church militant continues to be affected, tempted, bombarded, damaged and in some places, destroyed by sexual sins like premarital sex and children born out of wedlock or tragically aborted, like adultery, divorce and multiple remarriages; like unmarried "Christian" couples living together and like the foolish encouragement of premarital sex from all quarters.

Let us fight today to walk in the light, for the sake of our own souls and others. As Steve Green sang, "For the soul that remains in sin, with a conscience clear, guard your heart."