

The Children of Light

Paul's main argument in chapters 4-6 of Ephesians is that we must live our lives consistently with what we profess to believe. In Chapter 5 specifically, he is saying that our sexual conduct must be consistent with our faith. In verses 5 and 6, he has made it plain that we must remember the judgment of God upon these acts, but in verses 7-14, he adds another, more positive, motivation for our lifestyles as Christians.

Ephesians 5:7-14

7 Therefore do not become partners with them; **8** for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light **9** (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), **10** and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. **11** Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. **12** For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. **13** But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, **14** for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

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

Let's make three major observations.

I. Christian conversion is a radical transformation of one's nature (vv. 7,8a).

Plato wrote, "We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark; the real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light."

The author, James Michener, once said, "An age is called 'dark,' not because the light fails to shine but because people refuse to see it." How true that is of the natural man as Paul describes him in Ephesians 4:18-21.

But Paul says here that we have been transformed from darkness to light. Once we were ignorant, immoral, and dead in trespasses and sins; now, by God's gracious power, we are enlightened, cleansed, and alive to Christ. (Cf. Eph. 4:18-21; Jn. 3:19,20; Acts 26:18; Mt. 5:14-16)

II. The radical transformation of our character demands a radical change in our lifestyles (8b-14a).

Paul says we must now "Walk as children of light." What does this mean? Five things:

a. Bear the fruit of light (8b,9)

We are becoming good, right, and true not because we are "turning over a new leaf," but rather because we are united to Jesus Christ; that is, our new ethic is an intuitive one. We are simply living out the life we've been given. We are bearing "the fruit of light" out of our new nature.

b. Aim to please the Lord (10)

Unlike the pagan, who conforms to his ethic out of a sense of personal honor, the Christian conforms to the biblical ethic out of a deep desire to please the Lord. The former is ultimately focused on the self, the latter on God and His glory.

c. Renounce deeds of darkness (11a)

If we are to walk as children of light, inevitably we must be willing and ready to eliminate deeds of darkness from our lives. We must turn our backs on our old practices.

d. Expose deeds of darkness (11b,12)

There are times when we simply must speak up about the evils we see around us, but here the Apostle is most likely exhorting us to expose evil deeds through our transformed lifestyles. The very fact that we don't participate often communicates volumes to those around us.

e. Spread the light (13,14a)

Carl Jung, the famous Swiss psychiatrist of the early twentieth century wrote, "As far as we can discern, the sole purpose of existence is to kindle a light in the darkness of being." This world is longing for true light.

The Apostle here reminds us that when we let our light shine it transforms our environment. The things and people around us often become light. Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (Mt. 5:14-16)

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

III. The transformation of our nature and our lifestyle leads to unspeakable blessing (14b)

We all want to experience the light of our father's favor upon us. Here's what Paul is telling us: that God has answered the ancient longings of His people and the promises of His prophets by sending His own Son, Who is full of light, to shine down upon us. His loving gaze, His approving smile, His radiant face is all we ever needed, and He gives it to us in full.

Discussion Questions

1. How does Paul describe the saints in Ephesians 5:8? What does this mean?
2. In verses 9-14, describe what it means for us to "Walk as children of light."
3. How does a person "discern what is pleasing to the Lord?"
4. Describe a situation in which saints today should expose "unfruitful works of darkness." (v. 11)

5. In verse 14 Paul seems to be quoting a poem or hymn that is familiar to the Ephesians. With this quotation, what is he teaching us about what it means to walk as children of light?

Going Deeper

1. When are you most severely tempted to "walk on the dark side" by participating in evil?
2. In what ways should you more freely shine your light before others?