Ephesians 5:1–20

# Main Point

Christians must walk in love, speak in love, and shine the light of Christ so that the works of darkness can be exposed and the workers of darkness can become light in the Lord.

# Eph. 5:1–2

[1] Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. [2] And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

## Commentary

We are called to imitate God for we are his children. Imitating God is walking in love, for that is what Christ did when he offered himself as a sacrifice on our behalf. Christ’s life and sacrifice is the model for our own walk. More so, he is the image of the invisible God whom we are to imitate. We are sons of God and Christ is the Son of God; we are to follow our visible brother in order to imitate our invisible Father. As a “fragrant offering and sacrifice”, Christ gave all of himself in love for others; we are called to walk in the same type of radical love. Peter O’Brien writes, “Ultimately, then, to imitate God is to imitate Christ, and costly, sacrificial love is to characterize believers in their relationships with one another” (*Letter to the Ephesians*, PNTC, 356).

## Discussion

* How are we already imitating God in love?
* How can we grow in radical, Christ-like love to others?

# Eph. 5:3–4

[3] But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. [4] Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.

## Commentary

Per O’Brien, “All these forms of sexual immorality and greed are so serious that they must not even be mentioned among God’s people. . . . believers should not only shun these sins but also avoid thinking and talking about them” (360). So, verses 3 and 4 are an exhortation to keep our words pure and not discuss sexual immorality, impurity, covetousness, filthiness, foolish talk, or crude joking. Although identifying such as sins is necessary, believers cannot speak of such things as common. The filthiness, foolish talk, and crude joking are predominately words describing sexually immoral language. O’Brien writes, “All three terms refer to a dirty mind expressing itself in vulgar conversation” (361).

Although sexual sin dominates Paul’s list, he moves from such sin to the root cause: covetousness or idolatry. We sin sexually (or speak of it) when we desire that which we are forbidden to have. Speaking of such desires begets those very desires, especially for those who are already tempted to sin in these areas.

All of these types of language are out of place. Instead of these things, our language ought to be filled with thanksgiving, which is the opposite of covetousness. We can flee such temptation when we are thankful for all that we are and have in Christ.

## Discussion

* How can we replace our covetous words with the language of thanksgiving?

# Eph. 5:5–7

[5] For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. [6] Let no one deceive 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;

## Commentary

Paul uses the strongest language in stating that those who practice sexually immoral or idolatrous sins have no inheritance in the kingdom. This verse should shock and scare anyone participating or contemplating such sin. By Paul’s words, those who habitually practice such sins are not Christian and are not saved. This not only identifies those who are currently outside the kingdom, but serves as a stark warning to all Christians to walk and speak in the light of the Lord. Furthermore, no Christian should be talked into sexual sin or covetousness. We cannot be deceived in such things lest the wrath of God come upon us! Even more so, we cannot partner with such individuals, especially those who are claiming to be Christian. Habits of sexual immorality and covetousness demark those who are living in darkness.

## Discussion

* What implications does this have on our relationship with the homosexual agenda
  + in politics?
  + in the church?
* What about other types of sexual immorality, e.g., divorce and remarriage, pornography, lust?
* How are we supposed to relate with “Christians” in such sins? With the worldly?

# Eph. 5:8–10

[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.

## Commentary

Paul gives us great news. Those who are in Christ have stopped being darkness and have become light in the Lord. There is hope even for those who are sexually immoral, covetous, for the sons of disobedience. We Christians have gone from darkness to light and others, by the gospel message, can make the same transition. Rather than being surrounded by darkness or light, we who were darkness itself have been made into the light of God itself. Therefore, we are to walk as children of light and not as children of darkness. We are to walk as children of God, imitating him. If something is good, if something is right, if something is true, then it contains the fruit of the light of God; this is how we are called to walk. As children of God, we are to speak, do, and seek all that is good and right and true in him. In so doing, we must discern what is pleasing to the Lord, that is, what is good, right, and true according to the Scripture. This does not require mystical discernment, but knowing, by his Word, what it is that satisfies God our Father. God has made us light; therefore we are to walk as children of light.

## Discussion

* What does it mean that we are light in the Lord?
* How can we know if we are pleasing the Lord, i.e., walking in the light.

# Eph. 5:11–14

[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.”

## Commentary

Christians are called to walk in the light and take no part in the darkness. By the light expressed in our words and walk, Christians are to expose the unfruitful works of darkness. Regarding the individual participating in darkness, Christians have been called by God to judge the church, not the world. Christ will judge the world in the last days. Therefore, we are to walk in the light, speak in the light, and expose the darkness of sin with the light of God, calling all to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The light of our walk and talk will expose even those deeds which are too shameful to discuss, let alone to do.

The language of verses 13–14 seems odd at first (“But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light.”) However, O’Brien explains these verses, writing, “The light thus has a twofold effect on the prevailing darkness: it makes visible and transforms.” The light exposes the work of darkness and can transform the worker of darkness into one of light. The hymn thus describes someone being transformed from death to life, from darkness to light, by the shining of the light of Christ.

## Discussion

* Think on your own sin that you only do in secret. How would your habits change if such sin were exposed?
* How can we expose the darkness of this world?
* How should we speak about such shameful acts?
* How can we shine light in the darkness for the sake of conversion?

# Eph. 5:15–17

[15] Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, [16] making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. [17] Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

## Commentary

How one should walk in the Lord is explained in verses 15–18: (1) not as unwise, but as wise, (2) not foolishly, but discerning the will of God, and (3) not drunk on wine, but filled with the Spirit. To the wisdom exhortation, Paul adds in verse 16, “making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.”

The evil days refer to this present world in which Satan is still the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who is at work in the sons of disobedience (O’Brien, 383). These days are evil when compared to the incomparable riches of the days of the eschaton. Christians are called to make the best use of the time in order to redeem the time, to transform evil into good.

O’Brien points out that throughout Ephesians, mystery and wisdom are related to each other (381). Those who are wise understand the “plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things” (Eph. 3:9). “This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (Eph. 3:7).

The fool in verse 17 is not silly or dumb, but one who despises God and wisdom; hence the contrast between foolishness and understanding the will of the Lord. This will was revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ, his work, death, and resurrection. According to O’Brien,

In our contemporary context, the ‘Lord’s will’ is frequently understood by Christians to refer to matters of personal guidance, and thus to God’s immediate plans for their future. But the divine will in Pauline letters, particularly in Ephesians, has a different focus, without neglecting the personal dimension. The ‘will of God’ is closely related to, even identified with, God’s gracious saving plan and, as a significant element of this, the formation of a people into the likeness of Christ who will be pure and blameless on the final day. (386)

## Discussion

* What does it mean that the days are evil?
* How is it that we walk as wise people?
* How can we understand the will of the Lord?

# Eph. 5:18

[18] And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,

## Commentary

In a larger section on walking as those who are wise, Paul writes, “do not get drunk with wine.” This he contrasts with the exhortation to “be filled with the Spirit.” Some believe Paul is teaching against drunkenness at the Lord’s Supper (as was a problem at Corinth), while others believe this particular connection may have been with the drunken orgies of the Dionsysian cult (O’Brien, 389). Due to the language, O’Brien notes that the language of being filled with the Spirit is not that of a one-time filling, but an exhortation to be filled continually by the Spirit. Paul’s command “do not get drunk with wine” follows the same verbal form and could similarly be read as “do not continually be drunk with wine,” allowing that Paul’s negative command may be primarily against being a drunkard, rather than against particular instances of insobriety. In the same way, Christians are called to eat to the glory of God, to feast at times (that is, overeat), and to not be gluttons. Either way, Paul’s emphasis is clearly on being filled continually with the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, being filled with the Spirit ought (more likely) to be interpreted as being filled by the Spirit with all the fullness of God (O’Brien, 392). Ephesians 3:16–19 talks about the Spirit strengthening our inner being so that we may be filled with all the fullness of God. Colossians 1:19 states how “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” in Jesus. Ephesians 4:11–13 states that we have leaders in the church to equip the saints for ministry until the point when “we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

Paul goes on to explain many of the outworking of being filled with the Spirit: addressing one another in songs, giving thanks, submitting to one another. These will be discussed in the next section.

## Discussion

* Is it acceptable for a Christian to drink alcohol?
  + to get tipsy?
  + to be a drunkard?
* How should we interpret, “be filled with the Holy Spirit”?
* Should being filled with all the fullness of God be considered instantaneous or progressive (leading to glory)?

# Eph. 5:19

[19] addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,

## Commentary

This passage describes the fruit of being filled with the Holy Spirit. In being filled with the Spirit, Paul instructs us: don’t be drunk, address one another in songs, give thanks, and submit to one another. The first consideration one must have is the context for this command. Paul could be giving instruction for daily living, or his focus may be on the corporate gathering itself. Not being drunk, singing, and giving thanks all seem like good church activities. However, following his command to submit to one another, Paul describes submission for wives, husbands, children, slaves, and masters. The context for those is clearly daily living, e.g., “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4) and “Masters . . . stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him” (Eph. 6:9).

If the context includes daily living, then perhaps our lives should be more like a musical where we speak and sing songs to each other for edification and to the Lord for worship. Perhaps it would be good for us to break out into song every once in a while.

## Discussion

* What is the context for this fruit of the filling of the Spirit (daily life, corporate gathering, etc.)?
* How could we sing to one another in daily life?

# Eph. 5:20

[20] giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

## Commentary

We are also to give thanks to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, thanking him always and for everything. No time, place, or circumstance are to be excluded from our thanksgiving. As David wrote in Psalm 23:4, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” Even when our circumstances could put us in the pit of despair, we are called to be thankful and giving thanks to our Father. We can give thanks to this Father despite our circumstances because we know he is powerful over all and has chosen to care for us, his children.

We can be thankful because our Father is trustworthy and will keep his promises. We can be thankful because our Father is good and will work all things for our eternal good. We can be thankful because our Father is gracious and has covered all of our sins through his Son. We can be thankful because our Father is powerful and has defeated all of his enemies. We can be thankful because our Father will destroy even the valley of the shadow of death, will cast away all evil, and bring us, his children, into his kingdom where we will live as princes and princesses, children of our Father, and heirs with our Brother the King.

## Discussion

* Should we really be thankful for *everything*—even the bad stuff in life?
* Why is it difficult to be thankful always and for everything?
* How can we increase in our thankfulness and expression of thanksgiving?