



## **Lesson 10: Taking a Stand in a Dark World – Walk in Light and Wisdom**

### **Teacher's Edition**

**Overview:** Paul continues describing the changes that should be seen in the individual lives of the members of a church so that they can do their part to help the body grow together in unity to the fullness of Christ. They do this by individually imitating God through personal purity and by wisely living a distinct life before an unbelieving world.

**Purpose:** Believers should see a life lived for God's glory will run against the grain of a corrupt world. This will require them to live in such a way that the purity and holiness of God shines through them, as they seek to live in wisdom under the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Passage:** Ephesians 5:7-21

**Introduction:** Nobody likes being different. "Being different" normally means weird, and weird means we aren't liked. Yet God calls his children to be different, to be weird by the world's standards because we live holy lives (1 Peter 4:4). Unfortunately, this isn't a very popular message today among believers. Many desire to be liked by the world, to be held in respect by the world, and are frustrated when they are misunderstood and maligned.

Living in a culture that's constantly shifting away from the Bible, Christians are feeling more and more alienated, such as when our Vice President was said to be mentally ill because he prayed and that Christ

responded.<sup>1</sup> But that's okay. The world is not supposed to like us (John 15:1-19; 17:14; 1 John 3:13), and the more it likes us, the more we should be concerned.

***It is popular today for Christians to want to be like the world to win the world. What is commendable about this? What is wrong with it?***

So if our goal isn't to be liked, then what is our goal? In Ephesians 5, Paul is discussing ways that we should imitate God. We should do it by walking in love in the midst of a culture that has rejected God and is living contrary to him. He then goes on to show how living distinctly needs to be done: by walking in light and walking in wisdom.

## **I. Walk in Light (5:7-14)**

Paul begins this chapter by telling us to imitate God. To live as God would live so that other people will see that and glorify God, just a child imitates his parents. But what does it mean when the Bible talks about light and darkness? The image is common enough, but sometimes when we come across common metaphors, we don't stop to think what they actually mean.

### **A. God is light (John 1:9; 1 John 1:5).**

***What do you think it means that "God is light?"***

John uses the image of light more than any other writer of the New Testament. He uses it in primarily two ways:

#### **1. Light refers to the moral perfection of God (1 John 1:5)**

***Looking at the context, what does John mean when he says "God is light"?***

What John means by saying "God is light" becomes clear when we look at the verses following it. Walking in the light

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2018/03/08/joy-behar-called-mike-pences-faith-a-mental-illness-then-she-called-to-apologize/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.6917a57efcd1](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2018/03/08/joy-behar-called-mike-pences-faith-a-mental-illness-then-she-called-to-apologize/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.6917a57efcd1)

versus walking in darkness is discussed in a context of sin and the need to address sin. When we say God is light, we mean first of all, then, that he is a God of purity and holiness. When John says “there is no darkness in him” he means there is no sin in him, there is no ethical deficiency. That John means this by light and dark can also be seen by comparing this passage with John 3:19-21. God is pure and holy. Nothing he does is wrong, and as we will see later, God calls upon us to live this way as well.

**2. Light refers to the revelation of God (John 1:9, cf John 8:12).**

Light by its very nature reveals. It’s amazing how hard it can be to walk through the well-known landscape of your own living room in pitch blackness. Yet one flip of a light switch makes all the difference. Likewise, God’s light is his revelation of how they ought to live. God gives his Word to show us what is right and what is wrong. This “lights up” the path of life, so that we know how we should live.

**B. We should walk in the light (Matthew 5:14-16).**

God is described as light. Christ is described as light. And we are called upon to be children of light. If God’s being light means he is pure from sin and exposes sin, then our being a light means that we should be pure from sin and that we should expose sin, which is exactly what Paul goes on to argue in this passage.

**1. We should live lives of purity (vv 9-11).**

After discussing the debauched lifestyle of the ungodly, and their just reward, Paul transitions into a warning that believers not be like unbelievers. Paul reminds the believers yet again that they “sometimes” or “in time past” (cf 2:2, 3, 11, 13)<sup>2</sup> used to live like the world, but now they are expected to live differently (cf 4:17).

---

<sup>2</sup> The same Greek word underlies all these phrases (*pote*), meaning “formerly”

***As you look back at chapters 4 and 5, in what ways do Gentiles act that should not characterize believers?***

Paul uses three words to describe how believers should live: good, right, true. First, believers should be characterized by goodness. This is a term that emphasizes moral virtue, being the kind of person that others would look at and describe as “a good person.” Right, or righteousness, is the quality of following God’s standards. Finally, our walk should be true – honest and full of integrity.

***In what ways can we practically live lives that are good, right, and true? In what ways do we struggle to live like that?***

Paul is once again arguing here that believers should live out the reality of who they are in Christ. He is not telling them to be light; he is telling them that they are light. So they should live like it!

## **2. We should live lives that expose sin (vv 11-14).**

God calls upon us not to simply live right lives personally, but also to be a force for exposing the sin around us. As John MacArthur said “To ignore evil is to encourage it; to keep quiet about it is to help promote it.”<sup>3</sup>

We should expose by our behavior, but when necessary, we should expose with our speech. We must always be careful not to go into more detail than necessary, realizing that we are at times dealing with sins so despicable that should be discussed only in the most careful terms, but they need to be addressed.

---

<sup>3</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., [Ephesians](#), MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 212.

***How can believers verbally expose sin in the world around them while still showing love to the lost?***

***What value does exposing the sin in the world around us have?***

## **II. Walk in Wisdom (5:15-20)**

Before we can talk about walking in wisdom, we must discuss what wisdom is. Wisdom is “the skill of living well.” It is knowledge, but it is a certain kind of knowledge. Just as biology is the knowledge of how living things work and chemistry is the knowledge of how chemicals work, wisdom is the knowledge of how life works. If you’ve ever been in a situation where you desired to do what was right, but didn’t know what that looked like you’ve needed wisdom. If there’s someone that you go to for advice when you don’t know how to handle situations that come your way, it’s because you think they are a wise person.

God is the true source of all wisdom; and to get wisdom we must have a right view of him (Psalm 110:10; Job 28:28; Proverbs 1:7). The New Testament tells us that Christ is made wisdom for us (1 Corinthians 1:30). We’re also told that God gives us wisdom when we need it and ask for it (James 1:5-7). But what does it look like in the midst of a corrupt culture to walk in wisdom?

### **A. Walking in wisdom means using opportunities.**

The word for “time” here means seasons, or opportunities that come our way. “Making the best use” or “redeeming” the time comes from a verb that normally means “to buy” or “to buy back.” In other words, when opportunities come our way, we buy them back. We use the opportunities we are given to be a light for Christ.

***What does it look like to not “buy up opportunities that come our way?”***

***In what ways has modern technology given us more opportunities to serve God?***

Once again, we are reminded that there is a great need to live this way because the “the days are evil.” The world and the age in which we live is corrupt and opposed to God, and as such we should

***Transition: How do I know what opportunities to take advantage of?***

**B. Walking in wisdom means knowing what God wants.**

Knowing what God’s will is can be tricky, but Paul says that those who walk in will understand what God wants from them. When we talk about God’s will, we can normally mean either his sovereign will (his plan for your life), or his moral will (his commands for your life). Often we want to know what God’s sovereign will is, but normally God wants us to be focused on his moral will. We want to know the future while God wants us to obey. Those who would walk wisely begin by obeying what God has revealed, and as they do that God reveals to them what his plan is for their future.

***Why do we care more about God’s sovereign will more than his moral will? Why does God want us to care more about his moral will than his sovereign will?***

***Transition: How do I get this wisdom and knowledge?***

**C. Walking in wisdom means surrendering to the Spirit.**

Paul tells us that rather than be drunk with wine, believers should be filled with the Spirit.

***Why does Paul compare drunkenness with being Spirit filled?***

Both a drunk person and a Spirit-filled person are being controlled by an external force. One by alcohol, the other by God. If we want to be wise, we must be controlled by the Spirit of God.

***What does it mean to be filled by the Spirit? How would a person go about being filled by the Spirit?***

A careful comparison of this passage with Colossians 3:16-17 shows that there the command is to allow Christ's Word to dominate us, and the result is the same: singing and giving thanks, followed by right relationships with others. This suggests that letting God's Word live richly in us is parallel to having the Spirit fill us. The idea is not so much that we would have more of God, but that he would have more of us (compare also Paul's command to "walk by the Spirit" Galatians 5:16, 25). Paul then goes on to show us what a person who is filled with the Spirit looks like.

**1. Surrendering to the Spirit should result in singing.**

This might be an odd place to start, but it's where Paul starts. The first result of being Spirit-filled is that we will sing songs to one another and from our heart. The songs you sing reflect what is in your heart, so what do you typically sing? What kind of songs and lyrics normally fill your mind? Do you ever "catch yourself" singing songs that magnify and extol God?

***Paul says that we should "address one another." Why is this? How should this affect the way we think about congregational singing? Who are we supposed to be singing for?***

**2. Surrendering to the Spirit should result in gratitude.**

Over and over the New Testament warns about the importance of being thankful. Already in this chapter Paul has mentioned the importance of giving thanks (5:4), but he feels compelled to do so here again. Those who are controlled by God's Spirit will be thankful for what God has done. *It's impossible to be Spirit-filled and ungrateful.* Paul says that it is God's will for believers to be thankful in all circumstances (1 Thessalonians 5:18) and warns that at the source of every wicked and abominable action is ingratitude (Romans 1:21).

***Why does ingratitude lead naturally to sin? How can we fight sin with thankfulness?***

**3. Surrendering to the Spirit should result in mutual submission.**

“You’re not the boss of me” is a very common sentiment these days. Unfortunately, it’s the exact opposite of what God’s Word teaches. When God’s Spirit rules our hearts, our mindset is like that of Christ in Philippians 2 – we seek to serve and to surrender our rights, rather than to cling tenaciously on to them.

***In what ways can believers submit to one another? Why is this so difficult to do?***

***How do those in authority submit to those who are under them?***

First century Ephesus was corrupt; twenty first century America is too. But God’s desire is that in the midst of this corrupt world we walk carefully. God desires that we walk as light, reflecting the light of our great God. We do this by living pure and by lovingly calling out the sin we see around us. And we do it by walking in wisdom. We do this by seeking God’s will and surrendering to his Spirit. And as we live pure and walk in wisdom, we show what our God looks like. And as we show what our God looks like, we build up our fellow believers and display the glory of God through the church.