

Ephesians 5:3-10

Walking in Darkness vs Light Part I

Introduction

Three over-arching concepts are covered in this passage of Ephesians: Out of the believer, Out of the world, Out of God. As Paul builds this passage he'll take us from the depths of perversion to the heights of God's character from heaven and begin preparing our hearts and minds for the capstone of Ephesians chapter 5: a Christ-like marriage. As we study this passage let us keep in mind what our lives tell the world, what the world tells us that our lives should be, and what the life of God looks like flowing out of us.

The Passage

But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. - NASU

Exposition

From Out of the Believer (5:3-5)

The Saints Without Hang-ups

Paul writes to the believers in Ephesus that they should not have a list of things being named as part of the practices of the believers within their body. This list applies to believers as a whole and should be considered carefully as we evaluate our own lives before the Lord in His Mercy and Grace. The believers needed to be concerned that a life that reflects progressive sanctification (and positional sanctification) gets attention, but probably less attention than a life showing inconsistencies. The saints needed to know that these things were not reflective of God's righteousness as well as not reflective of a thankful lifestyle which is thankful or responding to grace!

Not Behaving with Sexual Immorality or Impurity

Paul knew marketing. He understood that effective marketing in a first world culture such as Rome more than likely would include three things that would appeal to the flesh of a person who already had basic needs met in their daily lives: sex, lustfulness, or your desire for more. The word translated 'immorality' here is the Greek word *Porneia* (πορνεία). It would be easy to gloss over this word as simply representing sexual perversion and pornography but the Roman culture had taken sexual sins so lightly that Paul referenced this over and over in His letters (Examples: Romans 1:26-28, I

Corinthians 5:1-2, Galatians 5:19, I Timothy 3:2). This problem represents a mindset about sexuality that is pervasive in our culture as much as it was in the past in Rome: that pleasure and knowledge of areas of pleasure is good no matter the source and no matter the cost to gain it. Paul builds into his argument for the quality of a godly marriage later in this chapter, but understanding the root mentality of selfishness, existentialism and excess here will give you a good foundation for the passage later and understanding Paul's mentioning specific elements when he does in the later part of this chapter. The extreme abstinence and self mutilation that countered this mindset was *not* Paul's intention, and instead he wanted to call believers to a heavenly mindset which could render a consistent representation of position in the conditional life of the believer. If marketing aims to motivate you from the flesh, Paul wants you motivated by the Holy Spirit.

Not Motivated by Greed

The message against greed, which is easily seen in our culture today as much as it was in first century Rome, has been misused. The misuse tends toward the direction of monastic poverty where possessions or wealth are considered evil where Paul warns against selfishness and greed. The call of stewardship in the life of the believer is not a small one. Greed seeks others' possessions while a steward sees God's ownership of all things and God's use of His possessions for the good of the body. Benjamin Franklin, speaking of richness posited, "Who is rich? He that is content. Who is that? Nobody." The greedy man is not content in the sufficiency of Christ but instead longs for more. As believers we're called to recognize that sufficiency, that abundance from above, and we look to be motivated by God's provision in the next moment of faith in God's faithfulness and not the dollar.

Paul sees the distance the the greedy person may travel to achieve the fulfillment of their desire in his letter to Timothy where he writes, "But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs (1 Timothy 6:9-10)." His recommendation is that the believer instead flee from greed but instead pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness (1 Timothy 6:11).

Greed can be clearly pointed at the flesh and was part of the fulcrum of the serpent's pitch to Eve in the garden. As believers we need to focus on the Lord lest we fall into the peril of carnal attraction to things of this world of a disdain for them when they are the Lord's provision. We don't count our stewardship of a penny any different from our stewardship of trillions.

Proverbs 6:6-8

Go to the ant, O sluggard, Observe her ways and be wise, which, having no chief, Officer or ruler, prepares her food in the summer and gathers her provision in the harvest.

Filthy language, Silly Talk, and Coarse Jest

Obscene and godless talk go hand in hand. Their wicked purpose pushes each one further down the path towards destruction. They both bring dishonor and both lead to the tearing apart of people and the hurting of others. As believers we're called to keep our language edifying and thankful (Eph. 5:4c). Obscene or foolish talk are not reflective of the work of the Holy Spirit but I have heard stories of babes in Christ using 'salty' language in sharing the gospel out of ignorance of the imperative not to do so. Coarse Jest - a mainstay of locker rooms and Sitcom writers - is harmful wit employed to injure others and to build ones self up. Humor by itself is not wrong, but humor for the sake of pride and tarnishing others is far from edifying and should not be counted as Christ-like behavior.

But Rather Giving Thanks

As believers we're called to have a thankful attitude. Understanding God's context for life and growth will lead us to an attitude of thankfulness for His provision. This is not forced thankfulness, it cannot be faked! Thankfulness happens when we have the right context, we understand God's sovereignty, we understand His love, we understand His use of trials and suffering, and we know we've been appointed as His ambassadors.

Ephesians 5:5: a Recap and a Reminder

Paul re-iterates the characteristics that are not acceptable in the life of the believer because they're not of the believer's new nature in Christ. Paul already has told the believers of the inheritance that they would receive (thus not causing them concern for loss of salvation), but he has reminded them that their position does not allow for them to walk away in a carnal manner conditionally.

Into the Body (5:6-7)***Deception of Empty Words: Bringing God's Wrath***

Paul's writing to the body here reminds us of the emptiness of man's philosophy. While God has clearly given man intellect and the ability to reason and apply logic to life and life's problems, carnal reasoning is devoid of spiritual value. Often the world sees faith as mystical faith in nothingness and opinions rather than fact and the truth of God. Since the deception of empty words draws men away from God and leads them to sin God's wrath must be taken out on the unrighteousness. God's desire is that the whole world would be saved (John 3:16, 1 Timothy 2:4), but for those who reject Him, His wrath will come to meet out the demands of His righteousness. We are called to not participate in their worldly thinking and instead walk in a manner worthy of our calling (Ephesians 4:1).

Position Walked out in Condition (5:8-10)***You Were Formerly Children of Darkness, Now as Light in the Lord Walk as Light***

All those separated from God are unable to be in His presence. The lost person is positionally in the dark and walks out that darkness. It is the *past position* of the believer and is not their present condition which is that they are now: light in the Lord. The believer, being identified with Christ is positionally a child of the Light due to the adoption as Sons (Ephesians 1:5).

The Fruit of the Light is Goodness and Righteousness and Truth

The Light, being a reference to God (1 John 1:5), works through the believer (Ephesians 4:6) and brings about fruit: Goodness, Righteousness and Truth. Goodness has to do with the purity of the character of the being, or being upright of heart and life.

Righteousness has to do with the purity of the being and their freedom from defilement. Truth has to do with the honesty of a mind that is free from affection, pretense, falsehood or deceit. The work of God in us brings about three *powerful* characteristics that are not found in man on his own!

That we would be found to have a good, pure heart is reflective of God's work in the life of a believer. The conformity that we have with His Son will make the world call us Christian or Christ-like. The jaded thoughts that the flesh has about world events, political leaders, acquaintances, friends and family stop having a context because they are not good. The internal struggles over selfish things die down because as we're conformed to Christ's image we're reconciled to Him in every time, the battle is proved won.

That we would be found to have a righteousness to us, that our lifestyle would constantly be found to have God's righteousness, is an impossible thing for the carnal mind. However, we're called to walk in the Light and let His character be manifest in us, which enables us to have righteousness as a normal way for us to be described because our condition is being conformed to our heavenly position. The lost mind wants to be righteous, the heavenly mind is righteous.

That we would be found to have a true understanding of ourselves, worldly surroundings, and even more so: the scriptures. The life of Christ shocked the Jews around Him because He had the true mind of God evaluating their perspective and He would cut through the lies, misunderstandings, false teachings and tragic religious slavery and present the Truth. The Holy Spirit working through the believer will reveal truth and cut through the false pretenses of selfishness, arrogance, pride, and carnality and lead us to a true and right evaluation of things. Furthermore the Lord will bring us to know Him who is the source of truth, and brings its very definition.

Trying to Learn What is Pleasing to the Lord

Shame comes when we know we have failed in the flesh, it is a natural human reaction to insufficiency or being caught in deception - we know we have not pleased the Lord (or in other cases other people). Paul calls us to 'try to learn' or test out and prove what is pleasing to the Lord like an assayer testing the quality of metals. Simply put it would be to consider in our lives the thoughts we have (2 Corinthians 10:5), the actions we're inclined to take and testing them for their source of motivation and if we find them to be lacking in the fruit of the Light, we dismiss them and in place we look for the godly characteristics that we're called to (See also Romans 12:2). Pleasing the Lord is something we can only do as we're in fellowship with Him and His work in our lives brings about pleasure for Him. Somehow in the influence of carnal adaptations of Christianity the concept of pleasure as evil crept in from puritanism and other sources

where they eschewed the emotions and tossed the baby out with the bath water. Emotions are not our filter, we filter the emotions, but we are called here to bring pleasure to God through reflecting His work in our lives - a tremendous calling by any account. God is pleased by our doing His will and we should recount His work in our lives and testify to those things to one another so that we may help encourage other believers unto righteousness and even more bring greater glory to God, greater pleasure to God and cause the angels even more wonder as they see His grace poured out unto us.

Conclusion

Paul's call for the believer challenges us to evaluate our motivation for our lifestyle, evaluate what we are accepting as input from the word, and he calls us to be mindful of our position. God has permanently fixed the source of our life to be Him through the work of identifying us on the cross with His Son, we must reckon this while our condition is temporarily different from our heavenly position. We're not to impress the world with our worldliness, we're to please our Father with His godliness in our daily lives.