

Children of Light

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[0 : 00] The scripture for today comes from Ephesians chapter 5. Starting in verse 3, we read, But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.

Let there be no filthiness, nor foolish talk, nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead, let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous, that is, idolater, has no 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 become partners with them, for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

Walk as children of light, for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true, and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret.

[1 : 27] But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.

Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.

Addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

This is the Word of God. Great. Well, let's keep that passage open. Well, I don't know if your friends or colleagues ever ask you something like, you know, what is it like to be a Christian?

[2 : 47] What is kind of your experience? I don't know if you, how you would answer that. Many people who are not Christians, they have the really wrong idea.

Before I was a Christian, like 22 years ago, I thought it's like a hobby. Right? So, some people, they like golf, some people like yoga, some people, they like to go and sing songs on a Sunday morning, and they read a certain book, and they meet with another club on Thursday nights, something like that, right?

And, you know, some people, they, you know, you choose to change your behavior. Some people, they're vegetarians, okay? They choose to not eat meat. Christians, they choose to not do certain things.

But basically, that's what I thought. It's just a hobby. Not really something that changes your life. But my guess is many of us would say, well, you were really naive. And I realized I was really naive once I became a Christian.

Because you work in an office. And suddenly you're different, right? Suddenly you don't like what other people like. You don't do what other people do.

[3 : 55] People will think you're strange. People may even be hostile to you, right? Things really change. At the same time, maybe there's others of you, well, actually, well, maybe my Christian life feels like a hobby.

Something I really enjoy doing on a Sunday morning. But it doesn't change really day to day. When all those hours I'm there in the office, or with my friends, or in uni. Well, we've been here in Ephesians.

And I hope you've seen that, well, being a Christian, when Jesus comes into your life, it is life-changing, right? What are you? You are a new person. You're part of a new humanity. How does Ephesians describe it? Well, we were dead. One day, one time in the past, everyone in the world was spiritually dead. But then Jesus came and he took people and made them alive. Raised spiritually from the dead. People who used to follow Satan, now being children of God, following him.

[4 : 53] A complete change, right? And now the world is basically, in this book, divided in two groups. Right? There are people who belong to Jesus, and there's still the rest of the world. And you've heard it very strongly in this passage, right? I mean, what is this passage about? You've heard the contrasts. Well, this is the saints, the holy ones. And these are, well, strong language. The sons of disobedience. It's a kind of a, it's a Jewish expression, you know. Children have the nature of their parents. And how people live, well, looks like they come from disobedience. That's their nature. The next paragraph talks about light and darkness, right? Total contrast. Well, that is what it's, what we see here. People who are different. Two groups that are very different, spiritually speaking. And what is that like then? And today, we've talked a lot about, past few weeks about community, about loving each other, about church.

[5 : 55] But actually, we don't spend most of our life there, right? Most of our life will be in the office. Most of our life will be at uni, you know, in private, in society. What is it like then? How should we live then? That is what Paul moves on to next, as he talks about what it's like, yeah, to live. To live is part of God's plan, right? And the headline for this whole section was to, well, to live a life worthy of our calling, worthy of who we are, worthy of what Jesus has done to us. Well, what does that look like, well, in the world? That's, I think, where we're going today. And I hope that's useful, right? Because, again, that's so much part of our life. But what is that then? What is that? Well, the big thing, as you've heard, it's not the nicest passage. I was going to preach three weeks ago, but sadly, I got COVID. But I got this passage instead. Well, we should live differently, right? Being a saint, belonging to Jesus, well, very clearly, you should live differently, radically differently. And not really now about community.

[7 : 04] No, yeah, our lives in the world. And the thing he singles out, as you've heard, surprisingly, is things about sex, right? Let me read verses 3 and 4 again. But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness, nor foolish talk, nor crude joking, which are out of place. But instead, let there be thanksgiving. Now, there's various things there, but quite a few, right? Sexual immorality and filthiness and impurity and crude joking. We always think that 21st century is obsessed with sex, but actually the first century just as much. Whenever Paul talks about sins, the first thing he mentions is this kind of thing. Maybe helpful to define what does sexual immorality mean? Well, anything outside, well, sex between a husband and wife, right? So, I guess, in a church like this, what would be the most common things? I guess pornography. Maybe boyfriends and girlfriends sleeping together before marriage.

[8 : 10] Those kind of things, right? That is not within marriage between husbands and wives. But then impurity, filthiness, crude joking, I guess that kind of life, right? Where this kind of colors our conversations and our attitudes and values. But actually there's other things as well, right? It talks about covetousness, like greed, where you want something and you want it more than is right. But why these things? I mean, I'm sure you recognize it. I don't know what your office is like. I know what my office was like when I was in secular work. Well, why is this so typical of the world? Well, verse 5 tells us why, right? You can be sure that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure or who is covetous, that is an idolater. Paul thinks these kind of things are idolatry. It is about worshipping idols. I mean, worshipping idols, that sounds very, you know, you think of someone bowing down to a statue, right? That's what we all think when you hear idolatry.

[9 : 15] Actually, idolatry is about what is most important to you. Where do you look to to make you happy? The New Testament is very nuanced. That's why he says greed, covetousness, that is idolatry.

Because who is going to make me happy? Is it Jesus, my Savior, my King? Or is it money? Is it my latest phone? Is it this new car?

What is going to make me happy? What is going to satisfy me? What is going to make me who I am? What is going to give me meaning? Ultimately, yeah, that is idolatry, right? And so these are vertical sins.

We've talked a lot about horizontal sins, right? Where people are impatient and lie. But this passage is vertical. It sins against God. And actually, of course, all sins are against God, but this particularly, right?

And actually, that's also with the sexual immorality. The Bible would say that it's idolatry. Because we often think of adultery. Yeah, that's a horizontal sin, right?

[10 : 19] Adultery is when you betray your spouse. That is where you sin against other people. But then two young people who consent to something, surely that's okay, right? They're not hurting anyone.

Well, no, maybe. But the thing is, it's idolatry, right? You are saying, this is more important to me. Jesus, I know what you say, but actually, right now, this is more important to me.

Right? It's idolatry. What are you looking for to satisfy you in that moment? So, idolatry. And it's actually, yeah.

Pornography, right? Isn't it idolatry? You might think it's just looking at a screen, nothing horizontal. Of course, there's actually a whole industry that you are supporting. And what is it doing to your heart?

And if you're married, what are you doing? How are you betraying your spouse? Actually, there's a lot of horizontal stuff going on. But vertically, right? In that time. Okay. I'm stressed.

[11 : 19] What is the thing that's going to relieve me? Is it time with Jesus? Or is it something else? Right? It's idolatry. And, of course, we belong to Jesus. And so, he should be the number one in our lives.

That is who we are. And the world, yeah, they don't have Jesus. No wonder they look for satisfaction in something else. Right? That's why idolatry and, you know, how that is expressed and all these things, that is basically what Paul focuses on.

And he says, yeah, avoid these things. Right? Why? No, it's not who you are. This is not proper among saints. Verse 3. Right? It's out of place. Remember who you are.

Remember what Jesus has done for you. Why live like everyone else? Why? They look for things and they think they can help them. Actually, they don't.

Right? You've got Jesus. You've got the most wonderful person in the universe. You want to follow him. And so, you want to avoid these things.

[12 : 19] I guess, you know, if you're going out and you're young, I guess you know what that means. But also, greed. You want to avoid that. I mean, greed is harder.

Right? I guess with sexual immorality, it's very clear what you should avoid. Greed is harder. Right? I mean, is this phone okay for me or not? It really depends on lots of things.

Right? It's not a bad thing in itself. But it's, what is your heart like? Right? Is this something that I can have or is it something that actually, if I'm a good steward, I shouldn't do.

But I still want it. Is it too important for me? That's a hard question and I can't answer that for every person in every situation. But again, remember who you are.

Remember what Jesus has done for you. And now just live differently. Right? You're no longer the same person. God has changed you. You're in his family. Although actually, he then goes on, right?

[13 : 19] With other things. Because I guess when you hear this passage, the thing that we are worried about is, he talks about judgment. Verses 5 and 6. Right? 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.

Let no one deceive you with empty words. For because of these things, the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Strong language, right?

I mean, Ephesians has been a very positive book. But this is language about judgment. I mean, God is going to bring everything together under Christ. But how about those who don't want to be

under Christ? Those who refuse.

Yeah, they, of course, then they won't be in the kingdom. And the Bible does talk about a massive judgment coming. Which kind of, then, if that is the kind of behavior that leads to this, why would you be doing that?

That would be very inappropriate, right? As a Christian, I know that all of this is going to lead to this judgment. And I just do the same things. But I know, I'm sure there's people here, and myself included, you read this and you think, man, is this for me?

[14:35] Is this something I should be warned about? And it feels like a warning, right? I think we need to understand this rightly. Well, what does Paul mean when he says people will not inherit the kingdom of God?

Now, if you're worried, this doesn't talk about a certain standard, right? It's not that kind of, oh, if you've sinned this much, sorry, you will not enter the kingdom. But if you're below the line, then it's okay.

That can't be true, right? Because that's not the gospel. The gospel is that we're saved by what Jesus has done, not by what we do. And if the difference, here's two people. And they both trust in Jesus, but one has sinned too much and the other hasn't.

How are they saved? It's through their own efforts, right? That can't be true. And it's also not true that you need to be perfect, right? I mean, what Paul says here, in some ways it's impossible.

Because we're all broken sinners. Now, Paul is talking spiritually. You're, you know, there's light and dark and you're complete opposites. But we know that, yeah, I may be a new creation, but I'm a new creation.

[15:39] In an old sinful body. Right? We all are. None of us read this and think, yeah, that's me. Paul didn't have to write these chapters if it was easy, if this was natural, that the Christians just never sin.

No, we are all broken sinners. And you hear this, and, you know, I'm guilty like many of us. And, you know, maybe you have, might feel clean in this area.

Yeah, I'm sure there's many other areas of idolatry in our lives that Paul doesn't talk about. But what do we do then with these warnings? I think this is about identity.

Paul is talking about two groups. He doesn't say, watch out that the wrath of God is coming on you. He said, it's coming on the sons of disobedience. Right? There's two groups.

There's Jesus people, and there's those who are not with Jesus. Even when he's in verse 5, right? What does he say? The person who is sexually immoral.

[16:36] Not just the person who did something. The person who is like this. It's about identity. What defines you? Who are you? Right? And then, yeah, there are two groups of people.

And the question is who you are. Are you in this group, or are you in that group? And ultimately, that is based on what Jesus has done, right? Are you dead, or are you alive? It's what Jesus has done. It's not about what I do. I think the way we would then connect it to our behavior is, of course, that if Jesus is in your life, that would show.

Someone who's a Christian, I guess they're signs of spiritual life, right? There will be a desire for Jesus. There will be a desire to please him, a desire, you know, if someone is satisfied with Jesus, they will look for Jesus.

Those kind of things. Right? So what is your life like? I mean, I sometimes explain it like this. Here in Hong Kong, we have all these big skyscrapers.

[17:37] And what's beautiful is just all the lights, right? How they light up the city. Why are all the lights on? Because there's people at home. Where, close to where we live, there's some new apartment buildings, and they're not open yet.

How do I know? All the lights are off. Right? It's completely dark when I go out. So I know there's no one living there. Now, of course, it could be that just there are people living there, but they're all having dinner outside at the moment.

That's why all the lights are off. In theory, that's possible. But if every time I see that building, lights are out, there's no one living there. And I think that's spiritually the case, right?

You know, if someone says, Jesus is living in my heart, I guess you'd expect the lights to be on sometimes, right? You'd expect signs of spiritual life. And if there's never any sign, if someone just, you know, they're happy with sin, and there's no desire for Jesus, and, you know, they don't care, well, are you really a new person?

Is there really new life in you? Have you really been brought alive? I think that's how we should see it. Does that make sense? But Paul doesn't encourage us to kind of try it out. He doesn't encourage us, so don't worry, just sin as much as you want, as long as you're trusting in Jesus, right?

[18:49] We don't want that. Make sure you're not one of them the best way. Just avoid it. You know, live the Christian life. And isn't the Christian life so much better? Ultimately, whatever it may look like, Jesus will be more satisfying, right?

Ultimately, the Christian life should be much better than, yeah, the life of an idolater. But actually, Paul, he doesn't include this passage just because he wants to warn sinners.

That's not what he's about. You know, this passage actually, Paul wants this to be very positive. So, let's leave that behind. We know why does God, Paul wants this?

Well, he wants us to live shinningly. You know, he hasn't just saved you. He wants to use you. Look, your different life is something that's supposed to shine because in 7 to 14, he has the same contrast but with this metaphor.

Look, there's light and darkness and you are light, right? Verse 8, for one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Not just you were in the dark and now you're in the light.

[19:56] No, you have changed. You were darkness. You were this darkened person lost in sin, dead. Now you are light. And light is, well, we know light and dark, right?

We love the light. We don't like the dark, do we? No one wants to feel safe in the dark. Darkness is where sin takes place, right? Light, on the other hand, is good and beautiful and true.

And, of course, he's talking about behavior, not just knowledge, right? The fruit of light, verse 9, is found in all that is good and right and true. And that's opposed to, yeah, verse 11, the unfruitful works of darkness.

Beautiful light, beautiful, you know, good and right and true. That's who you are. That's how Paul wants us to live.

But the thing about light and darkness, it's not just a contrast, right? What does light do? Light influences the darkness, right? If the light shines in the darkness, the darkness is dispelled.

[20:58] The darkness is lessened. Isn't that the point of light and darkness? Light, you know, it gets rid of the darkness. It attracts people to the light. And that is what Paul wants.

He doesn't want it to just be different, but through being different, in your office, wherever, you are drawing people to the light. You are dispelling the darkness.

That's always been a metaphor, right? In the Old Testament, Israel was supposed to be a light to the nations. They knew God, and they lived with Him.

And all the other nations should see that and think, wow, and come to Him. Because they're supposed to be a light in the darkness. Of course, Israel didn't do very well. The problem is that inside, they were exactly the same as everyone else.

Because they were still spiritually dead. And giving dead people a list of rules, they're not going to keep it. But now Jesus is doing something new, right? In the New Testament, it's not just external.

[21:55] Jesus comes into our life, and He writes the law on our hearts. And so, Jesus says the same thing then in Matthew, right? You are the light of the world.

That means that He wants you to shine in the darkness and bring people to Him, right? Not just, of course, yeah.

And not just that they think you are great. No, come to Jesus, right? But verse 14, for anything that becomes visible is light, right? He wants you to make things visible, exposing things.

And therefore, it says, awake, O sleeper. Arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you. What a beautiful image, right? You are there, living, and people, and it shines.

And ultimately, it's Christ shining through you. And people come to you, and well, what's going on? Well, it's Jesus, and people come to Him. That is what Paul wants. That's what God wants, and isn't that great?

[22:54] I mean, we talk about judgment, and we talk about darkness. But God loves people who are still in the dark, right? God loves to save people from judgment. And that's why He wants to use you.

That's why He wants you to be a light in your office. Not just to make things hard for you or anything, no. He wants to save people. That's why He puts a light in the office, and that's you.

Of course, how do we do that? You know, it talks about exposing the darkness, right? Don't be, take no part in your fruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.

Now, some people wonder what that means. And some churches, they take it the wrong way. They talk about, they're basically pointing out sin and pronouncing judgment. There are some churches in the U.S., they do that.

They go to a gay pride parade, and just, you're going to hell. God hates you. I don't think that's what this means, right? There's no grace there. No humility.

[23 : 53] Just self-righteousness. Now, how do we expose? Just by our good deeds, right? 5 verse 16 in Matthew. Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father.

Just by being different, actually, you're showing a better way. I mean, remember Kenny and Katie. Such a wonderful story. But, you know, Kenny became a Christian, and a month later, his wife Katie.

That wasn't because he started to point out all her sins, right? It's because he was changed. He was different, and people saw that. She saw that, and she thought, wow, God is real. That is a picture of what God would love.

Why God has put you there, here in the world. That's great, right? Light in the darkness. And that's exciting. It doesn't mean it's automatic. It doesn't mean that, you know, you will always see things change around you.

Ultimately, people change by God's grace. Ultimately, again, people are spiritually dead. You can shine a torch on a dead person. It doesn't make them alive. It's only if God works in their hearts.

[24 : 59] And at the same time, it's also not always easy. I mean, some things are easy, right? We know that we shouldn't cheat, and we know we are full of kindness and integrity.

But sometimes, you know, being different in the office, I found it really challenging when I was in secular work. What do you do with, say, the crude joking we talked about earlier? Because we should...

It also says things like, well, don't share with them and don't take part in them. What do you do if you're with your colleagues and they... Crude joking. What do you do? Do you just stay silent and not laugh?

Should you walk away? Should you try and say something and turn the conversation around?

Actually, sometimes it's really hard to know. We want to be in the world, right?

We need to be with the darkness to shine the light. And yet, we need to be not of the world. We need to be different. And sometimes, what does that look like? It's very difficult. And many of us are struggling.

[25 : 57] Well, what is the best way to actually live in my workplace or in my uni? How can I best be... Yeah, be a shining light. It's not easy. It's something we need to talk about and pray for wisdom and those kind of things.

But we have the Spirit, right? We, you know, it is God's plan and God won't leave us unequipped. And that, in a way, brings us to the last paragraph, which seems a bit out of place, but actually fits really well.

Because what does Paul go on to? Not just live differently, live shingly. He says, live carefully. Live carefully. Verse 15, look carefully in how you walk.

Not as unwise, but as wise. Carefully. What does he mean? Well, you've heard a few contrasts, right? Not as unwise, but as wise. Verse 17, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

And do not get drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit. Now, there could just be opposite behaviors. But you just think about the things you shouldn't do. What kind of person is that?

[27 : 03] Someone who is unwise, foolish, drunk? It's someone who is unaware, right? Someone who doesn't know what's going on. Someone who is senseless.

And the opposite is someone who understands. Someone who is wise. That's the idea here. And the reason for that, well, verse 16.

Making the best use of the time because the days are evil. Because that's the thing, right? You are light, but you're in the darkness. God's plan isn't finished yet.

I think that's the problem here. And I think this is almost, you know, what God wants is for the light to influence the darkness. Actually, the danger is, the problem is, if you don't watch out, is that the darkness influences the light.

Right? Well, the danger is that, you know, rather than you influencing your colleagues, your colleagues will influence you. And so, be aware. Be careful.

[28 : 03] Because, you know, this is not a safe world. The world is evil. Right? It's darkness. And often you see Christians, they're not careful. Yeah, they go to church, but they're not switched on.

And they, you know, the world's values about money and career, they just absorb it. Or priorities and education, they just absorb what the world thinks.

Or, you know, whatever feels right is right. You do you. So many things, right? The world says it and we just believe it. No, you know, if we want to be light, we need to be wise.

We need to understand. And not by avoiding things, no. Paul says, you know, know the truth.

Understand the will of the Lord. Understand what God is like. And I think this last phrase really helps.

Be filled with the Spirit. Now, that's maybe unusual. There's debate. What does this mean? Be filled with the Spirit. Some people, they think there's a kind of, you know, one of your being zapped by the, they call it the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

[29 : 08] Where suddenly the Holy Spirit does something and you're completely transformed. Now, whether that's in the Bible or not, that's not what this passage is about. You can't see it well here, but the Greek tense is about keep being filled.

Keep continually being filled with the Spirit. Or by the Spirit. Keep being filled. How do you live in the world? How do you live in the evil days? Keep being filled by the Spirit.

And then you think, well, how does being filled use in Ephesians? Well, remember chapter 3, right? Being filled to the fullness of God. How? Well, if the Spirit works in you to make you know Jesus' love, then you are filled.

Then you get filled to the fullness of God. So, that's what we need to be. Again, you know, having the Spirit fill us with Christ's love, with the gospel. That is when we can live in this world, right?

Because what happens if people do that? Well, you can read it here, right? We get a community that's alive with Christ, that's alive with the gospel. Verse 19, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[30 : 22] A community that is alive with the gospel, that is alive with joy to Christ. A community that sings to each other. I guess back then people didn't have their paper Bibles.

How did they remember the gospel? They knew it in song and they sang it to each other. People who are giving thanks because they're just so alive. They know their Father.

They know He's in control. They know His goodness. Can you see? In a way, we're back at community, right? Just like we always get in Ephesians. How can we live out in the world?

Well, through what we do here. Or what you do in the morning. Right? Filling yourself with the gospel. Filling yourself with Christ as you see Him in the Word.

As we do that together. So, yeah. We want to be a shining light. What do we need to do? Actually, it starts again with renewal, right? It starts with, well, with church.

[31 : 20] With CG. With daily delight. Do sign up for that course. If you're feeling that, man, I'm not daily being renewed. Would be great. But that's what we need to do, right?

Then, well, as we say every week, then we can go into Hong Kong this week. God wants us to go into Hong Kong this week. Do the good works He has prepared for us. But we can't do it by ourselves.

We can't do it on our own. How do we do it? Well, blessed with all the riches of grace in Christ. Rooted in the love of the Father. Strengthened by the Spirit.

Great. Well, what a wonderful vision, right? Let's pray that God would make that real for us. Our Father, we confess that this passage is so true for us.

We were darkness. Still there's so much darkness in us. And yet, thank you for saving us. Thank you for coming into our life and making us light. Changing us.

[32 : 21] Father, we want to live like this. We want to be light shining here in Hong Kong. In the places you've put us. In the whole city.

Father, we need to be renewed again. Please keep doing that in us. Make it something intentional for us. But then use us. Help us to see where we are finding meaning in other things.

Where we are worshipping idols in our hearts. Not by bowing down, but just in what we love and treasure. Help us to see that next to Jesus and turn away. To turn to Him and find everything in

Him.

And would that come through us? Just knowing Him more. Spending time with Him. That we don't want to go somewhere else. Father, we know we're all sinners in this regard.

And yet, draw us again to Jesus. And as we love Him more, would the other things just fade away in the light of His glorious grace. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

[33 : 18] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.