6-30-19

Ephesians 5:7-14

We have been looking quite intently at Paul’s admonishment to avoid all forms of sexual sin and greed, which amounts to idolatry. Christians are called to imitate God, not the world or those of the world. He calls these people “sons of disobedience” and makes it clear that these will face the wrath of God. We cannot imagine the terror of facing the wrath of God; it’s not something we want to face or even toy with. And so, Paul tells us in verse 7, “Therefore do not be partakers with them”.

We do not want to partake of their activities. If we do, it is a very good indication that we are sons of disobedience ourselves and not sons of the living God. Along with this, we do not want to be partakers of their final destination: The hands of an angry God. As children of God, we have a much brighter future.

Paul is telling us in yet another way, that if we are in Christ, we are different; we are new creatures; we have put off the old man and put on the new. Verse 8 tells us, “for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light”. The first striking thing about this verse is that it tells us that we *were* darkness; not *in* darkness. While the Bible makes it clear that we were in darkness, we see here that it is much more than that. We were darkness; darkness described us.

This was the condition of every single one of us before we accepted Jesus as Saviour; it is still the condition of everyone who has not accepted Him. The metaphor of darkness indicates ignorance, evil, spiritual blindness, a lack of knowledge about God, a complete inability to do anything pleasing to Him. This darkness enveloped our minds, our hearts, our wills; it was actually a state of spiritual death. This is how we were; this is how all non-believers are. This darkness is evil and it leads to all the sins that Paul has been talking about and it leads to eternal death. We do not want to be partakers of that.

There is a huge difference for believers; and again, we must pay attention to the wording. Paul doesn’t tell us we are *in* the light, although that is true, but he tells us that we *are* light. Our very lives are light and they ought to shine in the darkness. There is another important difference: Notice that we are darkness by ourselves, but we are light in the Lord.

We can be, and are, evil by ourselves; that is our fallen human nature. Our nature is so fallen that we can’t be light ourselves, no matter how hard we try. The nature of light we have is only through Jesus; it is His light that we display. It is because we are **in** Jesus, an actual part of Him, that we have become light. And that light permeates our minds, our hearts, and our wills. We develop the mind of Christ; His love for God and people; and our desire, our will, matches His.

Because this is who we are, we must walk as children of light. Recall that Jesus is the light of the world; we are to reflect Jesus. Our light is to shine before men, not be placed under a basket. This matches verse 1, we are to be imitators of God. Also, verse 4:17, that we no longer walk as gentiles but as Christians. We are Christians, we need to act like it. We are called to be holy; different from the world. Look back over your life; there must be a difference in the way you live now from the way you lived then. There must be a different state of mind. If there is not, then there is a problem and it must be corrected. Pray for true salvation, pray for sanctification, pray for the Holy Spirit to work in your life to make you holy; and then, walk as a child of light.

Paul has an aside here in verse 9, where he talks about the fruit of the Light. We are used to the idea of the fruit of the Spirit, and this is very much the same thing. Goodness and righteousness and truth are essential parts of the Christian life; but they are the result of the Light, not the cause of it. A plant must have light to bear fruit; if it is kept in darkness, no fruit will come and the plant will wither. If we do not keep ourselves in Christ, we will not produce fruit; we will wither. It is for us as Christians, to remain in the light of Christ. In this way, we will be good and righteous and true.

We see later mention of “unfruitful deeds” or “fruitless works”, either of which is in darkness. Notice a difference here in the reference to “deeds” or “works”. These are things that people do; and when done in darkness they are sin. Sin produces no fruit; it merely leads to weakness and sickness and death. The fruit of the Light is not so much what we do as what we are; as what we are becoming in Jesus. What we become in Christ, in turn, leads to good works that are pleasing to God.

This leads us to what Paul tells us next that we are to be doing; “trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord”. The words “trying to learn” carry the idea of “discerning”. When faced with two choices or paths, the Christian must discern which is pleasing to the Lord; not simply which is pleasing to himself. Here again, is a situation where we must have the Holy Spirit. Without His guidance and strength, we simply do not have the ability to please God. But at the same time, we are to work at using the guidance and strength He provides to please God. We are called to put forth effort, we are called to work; it just needs to be in His strength.

There is no coasting in the Christians life. We have work to do that God prepared for us from before the beginning of time. It is obvious from Ephesians 6 and other parts of the Bible that we are called to war; we are in battle. There is no taking our leisure in battle. Certainly, we are called to our Sabbath rest; but that is not a slothful existence, believing that we have nothing to do.

It can be difficult for us because sometimes we are called to act and sometimes, we are called to wait on the Lord. Sometimes we are called to work and fight, and sometimes we are called to rest. How do we know which to do? Here is why we are told to “discern what is pleasing to the Lord”.

How do we do that? It comes down to the Word, the Bible, with prayer. When we read the Gospels, we learn what Jesus did. Jesus is the perfect example of what pleases God. When we read the rest of the New Testament, we have commentary on what Jesus did and examples to follow. When we read the Old Testament, we learn the things that God wants His people to do and what He does not want them to do. Throughout the Bible, we learn what is pleasing to the Lord.

Prayer is important because the Bible is a spiritual book. We cannot discern its meaning without the illumination of the Holy Spirit. We see a tremendous example of this in satan. Satan knows the Bible. He quoted from it in order to temp Jesus in the wilderness. He quotes it in the mouths of non-believers in order to make Christians look bad. He knows it, but he does not understand it. If he did, he would not have crucified Jesus. He didn’t understand that Jesus came to die for our sins. In bringing about Jesus’ death, he helped bring about his own defeat.

Not just reading but studying the Bible; also praying for understanding; this is how we learn what is pleasing to the Lord. It is a lifelong process, full of disappointments and setbacks; but it is all part of our sanctification process. It is important work, and it must be our top priority. Jesus is very clear that He will not accept second place.

We have already mentioned the “unfruitful deeds of darkness”, and Paul admonishes us to avoid participation in them. Unfruitful deeds are not pleasing to the Lord. Deeds of darkness are not pleasing to the Lord. Remember what the Lord has done for us and we ought to be compelled to do the things that are pleasing to Him. Still, we are drawn to darkness; that is our fallen human nature. But that drawing is no excuse for participation. The Bible tells us that we are given the strength to avoid temptation.

Verse 11 continues that we not only avoid evil but expose it. These next few verses are kind of tough to get the meaning of; but we can certainly follow the flow of what Paul is saying. By exposing, Paul is not telling us to go around calling out every sin we see somebody committing. There are some evils that need called out to put a stop to them; but in this case, it is our very presence that exposes the evil.

If you bring a light into a dark room, the light reveals what is there. You cannot increase the darkness to cover the light. The light will expose whatever was hidden by the dark. We, as Christians, are the light of the world. This world is in spiritual darkness; it is ruled by the evil one. We, who are light, cannot help but reveal what is in the darkness of the world. If we live our lives as Christians, non-believers can’t help but notice; and what they notice will show them that they are living wrong.

In conversation, they will hear that we don’t use some of the language they use. Ever notice how some people who usually cuss will stop when speaking around you? Not everyone; some have a seared conscience; but there are definitely those who will speak and act differently around you because you are a light and their darkness is exposed. People will notice that you don’t gossip. They will notice that you are honest, even if it costs you something. These are just a few examples.

This exposure will cause different reactions in different people. Some will react with hostility. Ever catch a child doing something he’s not supposed to? Sometimes they respond by throwing a tantrum. It’s the same thing. From birth, our human nature is evil; and evil tends to react with anger when exposed. Some will simply be respectful to your presence but never desire to let it have an effect on their own lives.

John 3:19

This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.

As Christians, it boggles our minds that someone would reject the light in order to remain wallowing in sin; that they would willingly remain in darkness with no true hope. But that is what people do; they blindly choose the dark, even when it is invaded by the light and the better way is seen.

What we hope for is the response mentioned at the end of verse 13, “for everything that becomes visible is light”. We hope and pray that when the deeds of darkness become visible to the non-believer, that they will respond to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, and turn to Christ. In this way, they also become light; The light that is of Jesus Christ.

Paul ends this section with an interesting saying, “Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you”. This exact wording is not in the Old Testament Scripture, but it seems that Paul has taken parts of several Scriptures and put them together; either in wording or idea.

Isaiah 26:19

You who lie in the dust, awake and shout for joy

Isaiah 60:1

Arise, shine; for your light has come,  
And the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

Jonah 1:6

How is it that you are sleeping? Get up, call on your god.

Christians know that this certainly applies to us when we are raised from the dead at Jesus’ return. Sleeping is a euphemism for death. Our bodies die, our spirit goes to heaven, when Christ returns our bodies will be resurrected and made new. But Paul is looking at things from a spiritual perspective. In John 3:3, Jesus tells Nicodemus that in order to see the Kingdom of God, he (and all of us) must be born again. Jesus is talking about our spirits being reborn by God. Because of sin, our spirits are dead, our spirits are separated from God; when we believe on Christ as Saviour, God recreates our spirits. Our spirits are alive again.

So, our spirits are dead, asleep, until the light of Christ shines on them. When our spirits are reborn, Christ continues to shine on us so that we may produce that good fruit that is pleasing to Him.

Prayer

LORD, if there is anyone here who has not truly accepted You as Saviour, please, convict them now. Bring their heart to repentance and provide that faith needed to trust You and You alone.

For those of us who are Yours; I pray for an outpouring of Your Holy Spirit, that our desire to please You would increase. Make us thirsty for Your word, that we may be able to discern those things that are according to Your will.

Strengthen us, Lord, that we may resist the temptations of this world, of satan, and of our flesh. Keep before us that vision of Jesus paying the price of our sins. Also, keep before us that vision of Him rising from the dead, defeating death; that we may cling to that bright and glorious future that awaits.

We pray these things in Jesus’ name

Amen