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## Walking In Light Ephesians 5:8-14

**Intro:** This section began with an exhortation from the Apostle Paul to all Christians to imitate God. Of course, we will only do this to the degree that a child will imitate the chief characteristics of their parents. So, as children of God, our spiritual “genes” should lead us, along with the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, in the direction of the moral character of God. The first way Paul says that believers are to imitate God is by walking in love. [1 John 1:5](#) tells us that God is love so it only stands to reason that God’s children should also walk in love. Paul had already described to us what walking in love looks like in relation to the Body of Christ ([4:25-32](#)). Now, he lays out what walking in love should never look like ([5:3-7](#)). All of the sins Paul mentions in this section work directly against the principle of love; thus, they should not even be named among the saints, God’s holy people.

Continuing with the walking metaphor, the next way believers are to imitate God is by walking in light. The motif of light is seen all throughout the Scriptures. The OT in particular provides several connections between light, God and God’s people. God brought light into the world on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of Creation ([Gen 1:3](#)). When the plague of darkness descended upon Egypt in [Ex 10:21](#), it’s significant that just 2 verses later ([23b](#)) the author points out that although the Egyptians couldn’t even see one another; all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings. As Israel escaped from Egypt on that 1<sup>st</sup> Passover night, the Lord was present with them in a pillar of fire to give them light ([Ex 13:21](#)). Later, in the tabernacle and eventually in the temple, the reality of God’s presence with His chosen people was illustrated in the light of the constantly burning lamp stand, the only source of light in the tabernacle that allowed the priests to fulfill their obligations as they ministered for the Lord ([Ex 39:37](#)).

The Psalms are full of references to light as it relates to God. The Psalmists declared, “In Your light, we see light” ([36:9](#)); “Oh, send out Your light and Your truth! Let them lead me” ([43:3](#)); “Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound! They walk, O Lord, in the light of Your countenance” ([89:15](#)); “You have set our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of Your countenance” ([90:8](#)); “Who cover Yourself with light as with a garment”

(104:2a). The prophets also used this motif of light in association with God. **Isa 60:1** says, “Arise! Shine; For your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you.” And the reference we’re most familiar with, because it is echoed in the NT in direct reference to the life and ministry of Jesus, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined” (**Isa 9:2**; [**Mt 4:16**]). We see it in other places in Isaiah’s prophecy, in **Dan 2:2**, In Hosea, Micah and Habakkuk.

This use of the light motif carries over into the NT and is expanded to include it as a metaphor for salvation. In **II Cor 4:6** Paul says, “For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” Similarly, Peter says “that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (**I Peter 2:9b**). Ultimately, the metaphor of light is used to describe God’s character: “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all” (**I John 1:5b**). This is the characteristic of God that Paul’s emphasizing for us in this section. Because God is light, His children should logically and clearly walk as children of light.

**8** – This section employs the contrasting metaphors of light and darkness, which are used both to indicate good and bad actions (**9-11**) as well as contrast the revealing function of light versus the secrecy of darkness (**12-14**). This verse has a familiar structure, “you were once...but now.” We saw this same structure in **2:1-4**: you “were dead in trespasses and sins...but God” and in **2:11-13**: you were “once gentiles in the flesh...But now in Christ Jesus.” In each of these 3 texts, Paul establishes the new status believers enjoy by contrasting it with their previous situation. They were spiritually dead, but God has made them alive; they were gentiles in the flesh, but now in Christ Jesus they have been brought near; they were once darkness, but now they are light in the Lord.

The most important thing about this statement is that Paul doesn’t just say that before their conversion Christians were *in* darkness and that now, since their conversion, they are in the light, though that is true. He says something more profound. Before they were darkness, now they are light. He’s pointing to a change in them, not simply to a change in their surroundings. Before, they weren’t only in darkness; darkness was actually in them. And now they not only are in light; they are light and therefore must shine out as lights to

their darkened society. That makes all the difference in the world. If it's only a question of seeking the light or living in the light, then Christianity is no different from any other religion or philosophy, and there is no more hope from it than from any of them. But if becoming a Christian involves a change from darkness to light, then the presence of Christians in the world is itself hope as together we stand against the darkness.

Notice also that Paul says we are "light in the Lord." This could express cause or reason, meaning that believers are light because of the Lord's work. Or it could describe agency, meaning believers are light through the work of the Lord. Both of which are true but, in light of the context of this section, in the Lord should be understood as describing our location – within the sphere of Christ. Throughout the passage we see a strong contrast between competing domains: the immoral have no place in the kingdom of Christ (v5); unbelievers are described as the disobedient (6) while believers are children of light (8) at one time believers were darkness (8) but now are light in the Lord (8). This series of contrasts emphasize the distinction between 2 realms – one of darkness and one of light. As believers, we exist in the sphere of Christ, having been called out of darkness into His marvelous light. That is our current location!

**9-10** – In case his readers weren't sure what walking in light looks like, Paul describes the fruit of light – better known as the fruit of the Spirit – as consisting of all goodness, righteousness and truth. This clearly refers to the by-product or out-working of the light. These 3 constitute a mini virtue list that sketches the kind of values that are embodied by the light as light is regularly associated with each of them. Goodness is a positive moral quality that's characterized especially in the welfare of others. It's love in action. Righteousness here refers to the quality of upright behavior: rightness of character before God and rightness of actions before men. Both of these qualities are based in truth, which is the quality of being in line with what is true; especially as it relates to conforming to both the Word and will of God. Note also that each of these virtues are characteristic of God Himself, who is good, righteous and true. It's no surprise then that they also characterize those who are light, those who are located within the sphere of Christ.

Walking as children of light also involves finding out or testing what is pleasing to the Lord. Clearly, Paul is in no way suggesting that believers ought to experiment with potential sins to see if they are, in fact, sinful. That

would be ridiculous, counter-productive and contrary to everything he's been saying so far. The term finding out is more likely to mean accept as proved; a term akin to the proving of silver or gold in a crucible. The idea is that the children of light are to approve of the kinds of things they already know to be pleasing to the Lord. In other words, children of light are to be pleased by what pleases God. As the children of God, believers become like God in their attitudes and preferences.

**11-12** – Now that we are saved, now that we are light, “what communion has light with darkness” (**II Cor 6:14b**)? Light produces fruit but the works of darkness are unfruitful as far as spiritual things are concerned. Believers are not to participate in the fruitless works of darkness but rather, they are to expose them. Again, Paul's not advocating for believers to conduct witch-hunts on the lost or publish exposes' on all the wretched filth that permeates our modern society. Light characterizes God, light produces fruit; it also *naturally* exposes darkness. Paul is merely highlighting the inevitable contrast that comes from living according to the light with all goodness, righteousness and truth.

No surgeon would willingly operate in darkness lest he make a false move and end someone's life. How could an artist paint a true picture in darkness? The light reveals the truth and exposes the true character of things. This is why the unsaved person shuns church and the Bible. God's light reveals his true character and the exposure is not very complimentary. As believers walk in the light, as we refuse to fellowship with the darkness, we expose the dark things of sin for what they really are.

Jesus said, I have come as a light into the world (**John 12:46a**). He also told His disciples, “You are the light of the world” (**Mt 5:14a**). When Jesus was here on the earth, the perfection of His character and conduct exposed the sinfulness of those around Him. This is one reason why the religious leaders hated Him and wanted to destroy Him. Just as a healthy person unconsciously exposes the handicaps and sicknesses of people they visit in the hospital, so the Christian exposes the darkness and sin around them just by living a Christian life – just by walking in light. We should live balanced lives: positively, by walking in light; negatively, by exposing (thus, denouncing) the wickedness of those in darkness. But, it's not enough to just expose wickedness and sin – we must also bear fruit.

V12 acts as an editorial aside, where Paul inserts a word of warning. He says that it's shameful to even speak of the things that are done secretly in the dark. We, as children of light, must be cautiously careful in how we deal with the unfruitful works of darkness. Clearly, we're to have no fellowship with them, no participation in them but Paul also warns against speaking about them. Today's motto seems to be, "Tell it like it is!" Yet, that can be a dangerous policy when it comes to exposing the filthy things of darkness. If we're not careful, we may unconsciously advertise and promote sin. Christians must guard against an inordinate interest in the works of darkness, especially in times of testimony and research.

Some preachers enjoy reveling in the sensational, so much so that their sermons excite appetites and give to the innocent more information than they need. I cringe when I hear someone embellish their testimony by emphasizing the depth of their sin before they were saved. Yes, we know you were bad – we all were! Don't tell me about the miry clay that God has brought you from, tell me more about the light that God has brought you into! We ought to take Paul's advice from Rom 16:19 when he said, I want you to be wise in what is good and simple concerning evil. It's not necessary for a believer to perform an autopsy on a rotting corpse to expose its rottenness. Just turn on the light!

Before we move on, after having said all this about the wickedness of the works of darkness, we should also note that this is exactly what Paul is talking about. We're to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness; we're to avoid them like the shameful plague that they are. But Paul never says we are to avoid those people who are in darkness. That's our mission field! That's who we are supposed to reach with the truth, with the light. So, a healthy, spiritual balance must be maintained. We must draw near to God and walk in the light of the kingdom we now live in and walk in that light in front of those who are still in darkness, who are working the works of darkness. We are to avoid the sin and we are to approach the sinner.

13 – In contrast to deeds performed secretly in the cover of darkness (12), those secret deeds will eventually be exposed through a process of judgment. The word expose means to scrutinize or examine carefully, bring to light, *set forth*. The things done in secret will be made manifest, or set forth by the light of God's searching judgment. This alone is reason enough

for believers to avoid and expose the unfruitful works of darkness. Since those works are destined for eventual exposure, it only makes sense for believers to avoid them like the plague.

At the same time, there's a positive sense to this verse in that everything that is set forth by the light is made visible. This sense focuses more on the goodness of the light and its illuminating power. All unconfessed works of darkness will be exposed and judged before the throne of God at the final judgment. But there's nothing written in stone that says the sinner must wait until then. No, as we walk in the light, the sinful works of the lost are naturally exposed by the contrast. Many will be offended and fail to appreciate our testimony and lifestyle, but not everyone will resist. Some will, for the first time in their lives, realize that they are a sinner and seek to find a remedy for their miserable predicament. It's the nature of light to expose darkness and some will respond positively to the exposure.

**14** – When you think of light, you think of waking up to a new day and Paul presents this picture here. He uses a similar image in **Rom 13:11-14**. That first resurrection morning, when Jesus rose from the dead, was the dawning of a new day for the world. Christians are not sleeping in sin and death. We've been raised from the dead through faith in Jesus Christ. The darkness of the graveyard is past and we are now walking in the light of salvation. Salvation is the beginning of a new day and we ought to live as those who belong to the light, not to the darkness.

There's a long history of viewing this quotation as a passage from an early Christian hymn but this is pure speculation. If it was an early hymn, it was heavily influenced by passages from Isaiah's prophecy. The, "Awake, you who sleep" is seen in **Isa 51:17** and **52:1** where Jerusalem is called to awaken after experiencing the cup of the Lord's wrath and to clothe herself with beautiful garments. This context resonates with the believer's former state of sitting under the wrath of God as well as the expectation that they are now to put on the new self which was created to be like God in righteousness and holiness (**4:24**).

The phrase, "Arise from the dead" reflects the sense of **Isa 26:19**, one of only 4 texts that refer to resurrection. Here in Ephesians, a physical resurrection in the future is preceded and anticipated by a spiritual resurrection now as believers are made alive with Christ. The final phrase

reflects the sense of [Isa 60:1](#), where Paul has transfigured the glory of the Lord into the shining of Christ. Taken together we are to understand the reality of Christ shining on believers illuminates them and transforms them into light themselves. Believer's light-giving lifestyle is preceded by their waking up from sleep – their spiritual resurrection with Christ from death to life.

The bottom line of this discussion is that believers are to be God's light in the midst of this world's darkness. They are to be an enlightening element and this is to be so precisely because they have first been enlightened. But yet, not all who claim to be Christians walk in love or walk in light. How can this be? Is it possible that they are asleep? The one who is asleep doesn't care what becomes of their neighbor. How can they while they're asleep? A Christian might be asleep and not even know it. If you're asleep, you probably don't know it. As soon as you become aware of your sleep, it's evidence that you are now awake.

Last week I made the statement that the kingdom of God is never going to arrive on Air Force One. In the ultimate sense, the kingdom of God is going to arrive only when Jesus Christ returns to this earth and sets up His kingdom. But until that time, there is a possibility of a preview: His kingdom will arrive only to the extent that Christians, God's holy people – begin to live like Jesus Christ. 😊