

Walking in Light and Love

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[0 : 0 0] Well, one of the joys of being part of a church family like ours is getting to see children learning to walk. They pull themselves up, don't they? They begin to toddle, and it's not long before they can get under the communion table and even up into the pulpit all by themselves.

But before long, a trip and a tumble, a bashed nose, a scraped knee, and they're running back to mom and dad for a cuddle. But of course, it's not long before they're off again. They want to walk because they've seen mom and dad do it, and now they want to do it too.

And we're back in Ephesians this morning, and we've seen already this is a letter written to a church that is learning to walk in a new way. Back in chapter 2, Paul says to them that you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked following the course of this world. So it's as if the world had laid a path, a road of hostility to God and hatred to others. And Paul says we all once walked that way. But what did God do? Paul says to verse 4, but God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. By grace, you, yous, plural, us, have been saved. Wonderful news. That is true of you today.

If your trust is in Jesus, you have been spiritually united with Jesus and resurrected with him, made new, and been made part of a new family in which God, the living God, is our Father. We are brothers and sisters of one another in the church. So, Paul says to verse 10, we are now his workmanship.

New creations created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in. Walk in them. Walk in them. So instead of that old, well-trodden path of this world, God has laid a new path for his children to walk through life. And it's in this second half of the letter that Paul is teaching us then, as God's children, how to walk the new walk in Jesus.

[2 : 3 9] How do we learn to walk anew as God's family? Well, Donald left us with the answer last time. Look at 5 verse 1. Therefore, be imitators of God as beloved children, and walk in love. As Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering is sacrificed to God. As children of a heavenly Father, we look up to him. We want to imitate him, to copy him. That's what children do, isn't it, with mom and dad? They learn by imitation, by copying them. And the result of that will be that we no longer walk, as we once did, in trespasses and sins, but in love, following not the course of this world, but following now Christ and his self-giving sacrificial death upon the cross.

But like the Christians who first read this letter, as we sit here, we know we stumble. We stumble in that walk. And together, we need to learn and be taught how to walk in this new way.

Especially, I think, today, because the path that we are walking still takes us through this world. Remember, these Christians, they didn't move out of Ephesus when they became Christians.

Chapter 1 verse 1 tells us they are the saints who are in Ephesus. They are the saints who are in Ephesus. They are the saints who are in Ephesus.

They are the saints who are in Ephesus. They are the saints who are in Ephesus. They are the saints who are in Ephesus. And it boils down, I think, to two instructions. Don't be deceived into impurity, but expose it by Christ's light.

[5 : 01] Firstly, then, let's hear Paul. Don't be deceived into impurity. Walk in love. Imagine two paths running side by side. The church is walking one path.

Their neighbors, their families, their friends, their colleagues are walking the other path. Now, these paths are side by side because they both run straight through the middle of Ephesus.

They both run straight through the middle of Aberdeen. In fact, they both run parallel straight through all the world. They are side by side, but these two paths require you to walk in two very different ways, and they end in two very different places.

And so, in verses 3 and 4, Paul's instructing the church, Do not step back onto that old path or even think about it or speak like it.

And it's uncomfortable, isn't it? Because in these verses, he singles out the issue of sex. And that is uncomfortable, but we need to hear it, don't we?

[6 : 14] Have a look what he says. 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, no crude joking, which are out of place. But instead, let there be thanksgiving. Now, sex was everywhere in Ephesus.

You remember about the temple, the pagan temple of Artemis. Artemis was called a goddess of fertility, and her worship reflected that. Her priestesses were prostitutes.

But, if anything, you know, we're not passing by, are we, pagan cult prostitutes today? But, if anything, our society is even more saturated with sex than theirs was.

What we see, what we watch, what we listen to, what we wear. If anything, Paul's words, they've not grown duller or blunter, have they? They've gotten sharper. Now, to be clear, he is not saying that sex is a dirty thing that shouldn't be spoken about.

[7 : 25] Rather, he is saying, keep a clear line between the way that you speak and think about sex, and the way our world speaks and thinks about sex.

And don't blur that line. And don't step over that line. Two paths. Now, you might be thinking, you know, isn't that a bit holier than now, to say that, you know, impurity belongs out there in the world, but we in the church, you know, we've got it right, something like that.

We're separate. Isn't it our own sinful hearts, right? Out of which we speak. When we speak, you know, improperly or filthily or crudely, isn't it out of our hearts that we speak?

Well, yes, it is. But Paul says in verse 6 that here, what he wants to guard them against at this point is not temptation from within, but deception from without.

Do you see that? Verse 6, let no one deceive you with empty words. So where are those empty words? Where's that deception coming from?

[8 : 43] Well, for sure, it's coming from its source, its origin is in the world. But Paul's concern is that it is edging into making tracks into the church. See, the danger is that those two parallel paths run not only through our world, but sometimes also through the church.

In the very place that you would expect there to be just one path, a hard and narrow path that leads to life, sometimes being kind of beaten gradually out next to it is a broad and easy path.

And Paul is painfully clear in verse 6 that that path leads to destruction. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

So it should shock us. In a letter that has been so deeply encouraging, hasn't it? Edifying. Haven't we enjoyed this letter?

It should startle us. But at this point, Paul says, Yes, but it is possible. It is possible that there are people in the church who claim to be Christians who might not inherit the kingdom of Christ and God because of this.

[10 : 11] It should make us sit up, take this seriously. Once, brothers and sisters, sexual impurity, covetousness, dirty jokes, that was an expression of who we really were.

That was you for some of you not that long ago. But now, but now if we talk like that, if we think like that, it's contradicting who we are now in Christ.

That way of speaking, thinking it doesn't fit the new you. And therefore it has no place in God's new family. Now just imagine this if you can.

Imagine a family getting together for family mealtime. Okay, the kids have come home, and the family's just enjoying time together. One of the sons has just finished maybe his first year at uni, but hasn't settled into a church.

It's fallen in with a more worldly crowd. And around that dinner table, he begins to speak as if he were with his new friends.

[11 : 15] Dirty jokes, gratuitous swearing, that kind of thing. Imagine that, speaking in a way that isn't fit, isn't fitting for family dinner time, that has no place in the family home.

You would certainly shock the family, wouldn't it? I imagine it would spoil that special time. In a home full of light, there is darkness spilling out on the dinner table.

Friends, the church is that family home. And talking about anything, but particularly sex, in a way that is impure, in an unclean way.

Or even, says Paul, in a foolish way, in an unwise way, says Paul, it has no place in our family. It belongs to the world we came from, the us we used to be, but it doesn't belong to who we are now, and therefore it doesn't belong in the church.

And you might say, well, yeah, who's going to come to church and talk like that? But Paul's point, brothers and sisters, isn't just, you know, or it isn't, save that for, you know, work and uni and school, but, you know, at church speak differently.

[12 : 34] It's, no, no, don't be deceived into that. Don't be deceived. And so, brothers and sisters, how might we be deceived with empty words into thinking, you know, there's not really that big a difference between the way the world speaks about something like sex and the way that we speak about something like sex as Christians.

Where's that deception? Where are those empty words? Now, there are a few ways that we could go here, aren't there? Maybe it's worth talking about that after the service.

But one big way, I think, that that comes to us is a view of sex that is only about consent.

That is a view that says that what we say we want to do with our bodies defines, therefore, what is right and wrong. You know, if everyone involves consent, who can say it's wrong?

Who can disagree? Right? That's the spirit of our age. That we decide. No one can tell us what to do. Now, consent is part of God's design for pure sex.

[13 : 53] Certainly, coercing or forcing someone into sex, it is a grievous sin. But God's word says more than that about sex.

And yet, I've spoken, not here, but in other settings, I've spoken to Christian parents whose children have perhaps started sleeping with a boyfriend, a girlfriend, and have said, you know, if they're happy and they're in love, well, we're happy for them.

What can we say? If they've agreed, who are we to disagree? But they have been deceived.

Or think about the thing that unmarried couples say in the church when it comes to sexual purity, that they've set boundaries in their relationship.

We've decided it's okay up to this point, but beyond that point, well, we know that it's wrong. Okay, they might not be going the whole way, but the line between holiness and sin is still being decided by what we've consented to, what we've signed up to.

[15 : 11] So is it really a surprise when those boundaries break so quickly? They are deceived, deceiving one another. Or I heard about a Christian event in Aberdeen the other week where the question of consensual same-sex relationships came up.

And one of the answers that was given from the front is that that's something that Christians can disagree about. Some Christians think that's okay, others think it's wrong, and that's fine.

That person is deceived, and they are deceiving. Friends, can you see how the world's deception can trample mud and beat a path through God's holy temple, through the church, when we speak about sex in the way that the world does?

It's like that son back from uni telling his brothers and sisters, you know, don't worry about what mom and dad say. You do what you feel is right. It's all fine. It's all good.

When we hear that, we have to have our guard up. Do not be deceived by empty words. Because, of course, our hearts are sinful, prone to temptation.

[16 : 29] We even go looking for it, don't we? So that the way we speak, it reveals a lot about the way that the world has blinded us to the sinfulness of sin and convinced us that it's only human nature to think or feel or speak in a way that God's word says is immoral and impure.

You, the world, would love to deceive the church into thinking there's not such a difference between the course of this world and the narrow path of Christ. But understand, says Paul, that one way is walking in trespasses and sin and the other way is walking in love.

And there's no way, is there, that we can confuse Christ-like love, self-giving, sacrificial love with impurity. And so, says Paul, instead of that, instead of that, let there be thanksgiving.

Comes back at the end of our passage, doesn't it? Verse 20, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus. Hear that thankfulness, it's meant to be an antidote, isn't it?

A new way of speaking, an antidote to covetousness. Think about it, if we're thankful for what we have, it's the opposite of wanting what isn't ours.

[18 : 02] So the more thankful we are, we speak with gratitude to God for his gifts, the more we will love, the less we will covet, the less we will speak impurely. See, Paul's laying out, isn't he, alternatives instead of that.

Two different paths and walking on them is different and verses five and six, they end in two very different places. Paul could hardly be clearer, could he?

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. there is a stark warning there, isn't there, about our friends, our family, people that we know and love who walk that other way, but there is a stark warning for us here too, isn't there?

If these are the things that bring God's holy anger on people, what are the consequences if we are deceived into walking that other way? Whether we stay outwardly part of the church but secretly give in to an impure lifestyle or we cross back over into the world and give ourselves over to it completely.

[19 : 33] And when we read verses like five and six, you know, we immediately, don't we want to soften it with the comfort of the gospel? But friends, Paul is so painfully clear, isn't he, that there is no comfort for those who give themselves over to sexual impurity and do not repent.

For by stubbornly disobeying, what are they showing? They prove themselves to not be children of God after all, but sons of disobedience. And the stark warning of these verses, it pierces my heart because that deception is real and that wrath is real.

Let me say, if you are realizing now, it is dawning upon you that you have been deceived, that you are walking that other way and you've given into sexual impurity in whatever way, Christ has loved you and has given himself for you as a sacrifice upon the cross, a fragrant offering to God.

He is the one for all sacrifice to cover every sin, all sin. He was crucified for you. So will you now confess to him your wrongs, turn, come back, take hold of him, find life in him, forgiveness, and walk in his way of love.

Today, as long as it is called today, do not harden your hearts, but turn to the Lord Jesus. Brothers and sisters, let's receive Paul's warning, do not be deceived into impurity, rather, and this is our second point, expose it by Christ's light.

[21 : 27] Let's walk in light. Paul says, verse 11, take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. So he's been contrasting, hasn't he, that this worldly way of life with a Christ-like way of life, it's like night and day, he says.

And again, you know, we might think that this is really harsh, it's really heavy-handed. What right do we have to expose or to kind of show up other's sins?

But remember, he says, the context to this. Remember, we once were on the other side of that contrast. Notice that he doesn't say you once lived in darkness, but that you once were darkness.

Darkness isn't just what we did, it's actually who we were, but now you are light in the Lord. Who we are is different, we do life differently. So walk as children of light.

And notice the contrast in where those lives lead, what that life produces, verse 9, verse 11, the fruit of light is found in all that's good and right and true. And so, verse 11, we take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness.

[22 : 43] See the contrast there, the context. One way of life is barren and empty, but this new way of life in Christ is fruitful and life-giving. nothing. So I think what he's saying is, just like light reveals what is hidden in the dark, so our lives as Christians will uncover the darkness as we rub against each other and live together as a family in the church.

So it is not a call, not a call to be harsh or heavy-handed with each other, but it is a call to reflect Christ's light in a way that shows up the darkness by contrast.

That's how light exposes, isn't it? By shining. Now that's still a major challenge for us. You know, I wonder, when was the last time you spent time with a Christian friend perhaps who's backslidden, who's no longer thinking or living as a Christian in some way, perhaps particularly in this area of sex and relationships, and you've hoped that the way you speak or behave or relate to them would show them how unfruitful their way of life is.

I'm willing to bet that's none of us. We shrink from that, don't we? In Scotland, we hate confrontation. We even apologize when we don't even need to.

And as Christians, our gut instinct, isn't it, is that loving people, caring for them means not challenging them, making them feel comfortable. But Paul says part of God's work through his church is to expose the unfruitful works of darkness.

[24 : 38] Just to press in, just to go there for a minute, think about the way that we talk about watching pornography. pornography. How quickly do we try to normalize it?

It's something lots of people struggle with, as if it's something we should expect to be going on in a Christian's life. When Paul says it's shameful what they do in secrets, it's dark, it's totally unfruitful, what does it produce?

we use the gospel to make people feel comfortable about not living as a Christian. It's like we pretend to be more gracious than God is.

But if we're light in the Lord, we're here to expose what's going on in the dark, not to cover it up. And friends, that does mean, that does mean that we will make people uncomfortable or convicted because the lives of God's children, children of light, look and feel and sound really different to those who are walking or hiding in darkness.

You do the son home from uni metaphor slightly to death. If we hear him deceiving his brothers and sisters, the family needs not only to be on guard, but to lovingly challenge their brother, to show that his words, and behavior for what they really are, that they are empty and shameful.

[26 : 11] And if that makes us feel uneasy, what Paul's saying, really we need to go back to point one, don't we, and admit that at some level, at some level, we have been deceived about the difference between the world's way and Christ's way.

Paul says that it's shameful. Think about it. Do we really believe in the shameful of sin? if we feel bad for bringing it to light in one another's lives?

Or are we just happy as long as they're happy? And do we really, I wonder, trust Christ to shine his light through our lives?

In verse 14, Paul could be quoting an ancient Christian hymn, it could be a paraphrase of a verse from Isaiah, Messiah, he says, awake, O sleeper, arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on ye.

There's a sense that it's calling Christians who are sleeping to wake up. It could also be calling Christians who are living as if they'd never been raised with Christ to embrace that identity, arise from the dead.

[27 : 22] But the significant bit for us is, the verse says, Christ will shine on ye. Christ will. So, brothers and sisters, whose light is it that we are shining as we walk in light and love?

It's the light of Christ. It's his light shining through us, reflecting off us into the lives of others. And so, friends, that gives us some measure, doesn't it, of confidence, boldness, that it's not by downplaying the difference between the old life and the new that we are going to grow as a church family.

It's not by avoiding making people feel bad. Paul says, don't become partners with them. Don't lend your support to this new lifestyle. Don't make excuses for what is shameful.

Be distinct. Shine light. Show up darkness. There's another great example in verses 18 and 19. Don't make friends with darkness.

Don't get drunk with wine for that's debauchery, but shine light into the darkness. Be filled with the spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

[28 : 38] We want to stay friends, don't we? We want to spend time together, but brothers and sisters, you cannot be a better friend for someone than being filled by something entirely different than they are.

Not strong spirits, but the spirit. Even if it doesn't feel like it, that is the most loving thing that we can do for each other in that situation is not to be like darkness, but to be light.

Because as Paul warns us, and so he warns everyone, verse 5, that everyone, everyone who's sexually immoral in pure covetousness has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

If you're backsliding, or you know that secretly you have given in, and you're listening to us, and you're thinking, this feels a bit like a witch hunt.

Why is he going so hard after me? Friend, this is why. you are in serious spiritual danger. God's word says that.

[29 : 49] And you should be wondering not why is he going so hard at me, but why is the church not going harder at me? Friend, be warned, be sure of this, says Paul.

You need the light of Christ to wake you up, even if necessary, to raise you from the dead, so that you would walk as a child of God and inherit his kingdom. Apart from that, you will not.

So don't, please don't avoid or get angry with Christians in your life who shine light into the darkness. Turn back to the source of that light.

Turn back to Christ. Put your trust in him. Turn, start walking his way of light and love. Brothers and sisters, isn't that what we want most? For those who we know who don't love Christ as they once did, look carefully then, says Paul, 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. In other words, let's not muddy our witness and waste our time because the stakes could not be higher and the days are evil and there is much darkness and deception.

[31 : 08] walking in light and love then isn't just, you know, the kind of minimum level of obedience we can give to Christ without it being too obvious, but a question of being discerning, walking in wisdom.

How can I shine Christ's light into this dark situation without dirtying myself? or how can I remain friends and spend time with this person without sharing with them in the unfruitful works that I'm actually here to expose?

Those questions take careful wisdom. Careful wisdom. Prayer. Perhaps after the service you can share with someone how you've tried to work through that in your own witness.

But to finish where we started, we will only walk the walk if we are walking in love just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Look to him. If we do it without him, we are being judgmental, harsh, critical, and heavy-handed. If we are looking to Christ, how can we be?

[32 : 25] imitating his love, Christ came in his purity and shone his light into our darkness out of his love for us and he was not stained by our sin, but he exposed it, brought it to light.

We are seen for who and what we were, sons of disobedience, children of wrath. He walked in wisdom and his path led him to the cross where he gave himself up for the impure, the immoral, the covetous, the idolatrous, us sitting here so that we could be light in him and walk in love.

And Paul urges us, friends, then to walk that walk, walk in love, walk in light, walk in wisdom just as Christ walked. to let us love our brothers and sisters and out of our Christ-like love for them, shine Christ's light onto them and live out Christ-like wisdom towards one another.

And let us pray that through that God will build his church. Let us pray together. Amen. Gracious Father, how we thank you for your love for us even when we were dead in sin to you.

Thank you for Christ's love for us that took him to the cross even when we were his enemies. Father, we pray that you would keep us from pride, keep us humble before you.

[34 : 09] But Lord, never let us stray from Jesus or his path. Lord, you have laid it so clearly before us. Pray, Lord, that we would not think that we know better than you or that we could possibly be more gracious than you or more loving than you.

But Lord, Father, we pray help us to imitate you in this world to reflect the light of Christ and that through this, Lord, we would grow in Christ-likeness, that you would build your church and that the darkness that resides in each of our hearts would be brought to light and cast away.

Lord, cast the darkness out of us, we pray. Keep us from being deceived and let our witness burn brightly, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.