

## 8. Children of Light in the Lord—Ephesians 4:17 through 5:20

Having established God's eternal purpose for mankind in Christ and in the church, Paul turns to the manner of life and type of people children of God ought to be. There are two thematic statements given for this section. Eph 5:1-2 describes Christians as dearly loved children who imitate their Father: "5 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

Eph 5:8b-10 calls for us to live as children of light: "Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10 and find out what pleases the Lord."

Our very name *Christian* is a name given from God the Father according to Eph 3:14-15: "14 For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15 from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name." The Old and New Testament prophets told of the name God would give his people. Isa 62:2 foretold:

2 The nations will see your righteousness,  
and all kings your glory;  
you will be called by a new name  
that the mouth of the Lord will bestow.

Jesus himself describes this name as the name for the victorious in the church in Rev 2:17:

17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.

It is interesting that even to this day only true New Testament Christians understand the name given to them from God in Christ. In fact, almost all take the name of their denominations—Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, Lutheran, etc.—or take the name of their latter day sectarian groups—Mormon, Seventh Day Adventist, Christian Science, Jehovah's Witness, etc.

The name Christian describes those of us who are God's people in the household of God. Remember the concluding statement in Eph 2:19-22 where those made one in Christ *were fellow citizens, God's people, members of God's household, whole building, holy temple, and dwelling in which God lives.*

Because we are God's children, carrying the new name of Christ, we must not live as the Gentiles do. We must live to "do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Eph 2:10)."

### **No Longer Live as the Gentiles Do**

Eph 4:17-5:20

17 So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. 18 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. 19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

Paul returns here to the description of the lost and alienated offered first in Eph 2:1-3

2 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

The difference is that in the present text, Paul focuses on how the inward man of the sinner completely dominates outward actions: *futility in their thinking, darkened in their understanding, the ignorance that is in them, hardening of their hearts, and lost all sensitivity.* The end of this inward state of

mind is that they give *themselves over to sensuality* and indulge in *every kind of impurity* with a *continual lust for more*. The addict continually wants more; the homosexual seeks to perpetuate a forbidden life style; the sexually permissive adopt a license for situational ethics—on and on the list could go.

### **Put off Your Old Self**

Eph 4:20-24

*20 You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. 21 Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

Riotous, profane, and permissive living is not the way of Christ. We come to Christ by hearing, and by learning the truth. Once again, Paul harkens to a principle already stated, this time in Eph 1:13:

13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit . . .

What we learned was to put off the old self, corrupted by deceitful desires and to be made new with a new self, like God in righteousness and holiness. This is the transformational story of the new birth in order to become God's children. It leaves no room for iniquity and worldliness. Jesus spoke of the transformation of the new birth in John 3:5: "5 Jesus answered, 'I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.'" Paul described the process in Rom 6:3-4:

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

In 2 Cor 5:17, Paul made the new birth synonymous to being in Christ: "17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" In Gal 3:26-27, the children of God are in Christ and by baptism the also put on Christ: "26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."

Eph 4:25-28

*25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. 26 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold. 28 He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.*

As children of God, who are like God, there are acts uncharacteristic of God that we cannot do. Put off falsehood and speak truthfully—no white lies, no cheating, etc. When struck with flashes of anger, we are not to sin and we are not to remain angry. Do not give the devil a foothold, in this context, by allowing your anger to seethe and burn within. Do not steal but work.

### **Do not Grieve the Holy Spirit**

Eph 4:29-32

*29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

The contrast begun in the previous verses with *do not steal* but *work*, continues: no unwholesome talk, but only what is helpful. Since we were sealed by the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13), do not grieve him. Christians are to get rid of bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander, and all malice; and in contrast be kind, compassionate, and forgiving. This is the way of God who forgave us in Christ.

### **Be Imitators of God**

Eph 5:1-2

*1 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

If we are dearly loved children, should we not imitate God in living a life of love? Christ's love and sacrifice, a fragrant offering to God, stand as the supreme example of love for us to imitate.

Eph 5:3-7

*3 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. 4 Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. 5 For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person – such a man is an idolater – has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. 7 Therefore do not be partners with them.*

How rigid is God's moral law for us? There is not to be even a **hint** of sexual immorality, or any kind of impurity, or greed. These are **improper** for God's holy people. In addition, there should be no obscenity, foolish talk, or coarse joking. One cannot mistake this language: no immoral, impure, or greedy person can inherit the kingdom of God and of Christ; and worse the practitioners of all these evil behaviors are idolaters. Even if we follow these paths of wickedness because of the deception of others, we are without excuse. Since God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient, we should shun those who lead us down these paths of unrighteousness.

### **Live as Children of Light**

Eph 5:8-13

*8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10 and find out what pleases the Lord. 11 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. 13 But everything exposed by the light becomes visible . . .*

Returning once again to the transformation from children of darkness to children of light, Paul places on us the responsibility to "find out what pleases the Lord." There are no excuses and no scapegoats; we must apply the standard of light to all our actions. The fruit of the light is **good**, it is **righteous**, and it is **truthful**. Any other acts are fruitless deeds of darkness; and indeed, we are to expose them. We all must apply this three-fold test of the fruit of light in the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

#### **Good**

According to 2 Tim 3:16-17 the scriptures equip us for every good work:

*16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

#### **Righteousness**

According to Rom 1:32, God's decrees are righteous:

32 Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

Doing right separates us from the devil and makes us righteous. 1 John 3:7-8 teaches:

7 Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. 8 He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning.

### **Truthful**

When we accept the testimony of Christ above all others, we certify that God is truthful. John 3:31b-33 teaches:

The one who comes from heaven is above all. 32 He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. 33 The man who has accepted it has certified that God is truthful.

Even though Paul said that it is shameful to even mention what the disobedient do—as well it may have been in his day—we know that we have 24/7 exposure to explicit sexual immorality, brawling, drunkenness, vile language, and so much more on TV.

Eph 5:14

*14 for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said:*

*"Wake up, O sleeper,  
rise from the dead,*

*and Christ will shine on you."*

However, the light of the Lord makes all things visible for what they are. Paul admonishes us to awake and let the light of the Lord shine on us:

### ***Make the Most of Every Opportunity***

Eph 5:15-18

*15 Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. 18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.*

The Christian alternative to the evils of the present world is to be careful how we live. Evils lurk on every hand along with the devil who seeks a foothold in our hearts (Eph 4:27). We must be careful, for just when we think that we have attained, the devil's temptations pop up in our lives. Paul described the circumstances in 1 Cor 10:12-13:

12 So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! 13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

The Hebrew writer gave a similar warning in Heb 2:2: "2 We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away." Paul has stated his case for righteous living so clearly that only the foolish would not get it. Another contrast concludes Paul's admonition: Instead of going with the world to drunkenness and debauchery, which describes the way people act when they are "having a good time," we are to be filled with the Spirit.

Eph 5:19-20

*19 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Christians, filled with the spirit, seek to speak to one another in singing and praying—spiritual activities approved of God. Nothing contrasts the world of sin and woe to the world of the Spirit of God and life better than the comparison of drunkenness and debauchery to the singing of spiritual songs and prayers of thanksgiving to God the Father.

### ***Study Questions from the Scriptures***

1. Eph 5:1-2: Who are Christians to imitate?
2. Eph 5:8b-10: How are Christians to live?
3. Eph 1:4-5a: How did God choose us? When? For what are Christians predestined?
4. Eph 2:19-21: What are some names for God's people?
5. Eph 3:14-15: From where does the name Christian come?
6. Isa 62:2: Whose mouth bestowed the new name on Christians?
7. Rev 2:17: What does Jesus give to the churches that overcome?
8. Eph 4:17-19: How must we no longer live? How does Paul describe the Gentiles?
9. Eph 4:20-24: How did we come to know Jesus? What did Paul teach us to do with the old self?  
What did Paul teach us to do with the new self?
10. Eph 1:13: How were we included in Christ?
11. John 3:5-6: How are Christians transformed?
12. Rom 6:3-4: What is the process necessary to "live a new life"?
13. 2 Cor 5:17: What are you if you are in Christ?
14. Gal 3:26-27: How do you put on Christ?
15. Eph 4:25-28: What is compared in this passage?
16. Eph 4:29-32: What grieves the Holy Spirit?
17. Eph 5:1-2: Who are we to imitate?
18. Eph 5:3-7: What is not to be hinted at among God's people? Who cannot inherit the kingdom?
19. Eph 5:8-13: What is the three-fold test for the fruit of the light?
20. 2 Tim 3:16-17: What thoroughly equips us for every good work?
21. Rom 1:32: Whose decrees are righteous?
22. 1 John 3:7-8: Who is righteous? Who is of the devil?
23. John 3:31-33: How is God's truth certified?
24. Eph 5:14: What makes all things visible?
25. Eph 5:15-18: How do we make the most of every opportunity?
26. 1 Cor 10:12-13: What are the limits to temptation?
27. Heb 2:2: How do we keep from drifting away?"
28. Eph 5:19: How do we speak to one another? How often are we to thank God? For what?