

Walk in Light

Ephesians 5:7–14

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1. The Contrast of Light (5:7–8)

- Some translations and commentaries link v. 7 with the previous passage, but the pattern throughout chs. 4–6 is the coordination of the conjunction **“therefore”** with the verb **“walk”** (cf. 4:1, 17; 5:1, 15).
- **“do not become partakers with them”** → a command that implies full participation with “them” (= “the sons of disobedience” in 5:6). The term “partakers” appears in 3:6 describing how Gentile creations are now “partakers” of the promise with fellow Jewish Christians. Thus, fellowship and involvement (in a sense of enterprise) with unbelievers is blatantly incongruous with who they are now.
 - ▶ See **Psalm 1:1** for the example of the “blessed man” whose influence comes from God’s law and not from the “wicked.”
 - ▶ See also **2 Corinthians 6:14–18** where patent incompatibility is made between the believer and the unbeliever (“for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?”).
- **“for at one time you were darkness”** → the believer before his conversion; this condition no longer exists for the believer. Not “were *in* darkness,” but simply “were darkness,” i.e., the embodiment of darkness both intellectually and morally (Matt. 4:16; Luke 1:79; John 3:19; 2 Cor. 6:14–15; Eph. 4:17–20; Col. 1:13).
- **“but now you are light in the Lord”** → complete contrast with pre-conversion condition. Now, the believer “is light,” i.e., entire existence characterized by light (cf.

Matt. 5:14). The background of this statement is Genesis 1. Just as God created light and separated light from darkness and placed luminaries in the sky to light the earth, He has created believers by shining light into their hearts (2 Cor. 4:4–6) and making them luminaries in the world (cf. 2 Cor. 4:4–6). Believers can be light because they now are “in the Lord” [Christ] and so share in the very nature of the One who is “the light of the world” (John 8:12).

- ❑ **“Walk as children of light”** → the logical consequence of the believer’s fundamental change in nature from darkness to light is to reflect that change in how we live; i.e., walk in a way that reveals who you are. See 5:1, where the image of children is applied to believers as well.

- ▶ See also **1 Thessalonians 5:4–11** and **Romans 13:11–14** for close parallel language and ideas.

2. The Characteristics of Light (5:9)

- ❑ This is a parenthetical insertion in the middle of the verse in order to expand upon “light” by explaining the key characteristics it produces.
- ❑ **“for fruit of the light is found in...”** → the three characteristics listed here are broad moral qualities which serve as a guide and litmus test for believers to consider how their actions in specific scenarios and situations may prove to be demonstrations of these three characteristics. Believers, as “children of light,” are invited to compare their lives with these “fruit of light” in order to assess one’s conduct and genuineness of faith.

- ▶ **“good”** → behavior which exhibits beneficial concern for others, akin to *agape* (cf. 1 Thess. 5:15). It is the opposite of malice, which is characteristic of the old man (4:31). See also Galatians 5:22 where it is listed among the fruit of the Spirit.
 - ▶ **“right”** → behavior that is upright or morally righteous.
 - ▶ **“true”** → behavior which reflects honesty, reliability, and trustworthiness; i.e., personal integrity.

3. The Concern of Light (5:10)

- ❑ The sentence which was interrupted by the parenthetical comment in verse 9 resumes with a participle which explains *how* believers are to “walk as children of light.”
- ❑ **“try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord”** → a verb that means to “put to the test,” “examine,” “prove,” or “find out” something. The force of this word is not about making an attempt. It expresses the *means* by which walking in light occurs and the goal for which believers live. It involves testing every area of life and every action and behavior in order to find out what will be pleasing to the Lord.

- ❑ Believers “find out” what will please the Lord by assessing everyday decisions according to the broader characteristics of the “fruit of light.” Often times, decision making can be difficult in morally-complex circumstances. But the believer can examine his decisions through the lens of what brings beneficial “good” to others, what is morally righteous and upright, and what is “true” and full of integrity.
- ❑ See **Romans 12:2**, where Paul addresses how believers can “discern” what is “pleasing” to the Lord as they are renewed in their mind.
- ❑ See also **2 Corinthians 5:9** for Paul’s universal ambition “to be pleasing” to God.

4. The Command of Light (5:11a)

- ❑ **“take no part”** → in verse 7, the command was to avoid involvement with the wicked. Here, the focus shifts from the people of darkness (i.e., the “sons of disobedience”) to the works of darkness. This is a critical shift because from 5:11b–13 Paul will then call believers to “expose” these deeds, whether they be done by believers or unbelievers. The point is that, just as fellowship with unbelievers is wholly incongruous with the believer’s changed nature from “darkness” to “light,” so his participation in the deeds produced by darkness is equally incongruous and unfitting (cf. 5:3, 4).
- ❑ **“unfruitful deeds of darkness”** → while “light” produces “fruit” (5:9), “darkness” produces “unfruitful deeds.” Similarly, Galatians 5:19–23 contrast the “deeds of the flesh” (v. 19) with the “fruit of the Spirit” (v. 22). These deeds are “unfruitful” in that they are unprofitable and lack what is good and beneficial. They include that various sins and vices listed in 4:25–5:6) but are broad enough to include all those sins and deeds which are condemned in Scripture. In particular, they are meant to parallel in antipathy the “fruit of light” in that these deeds are characterized by malice, unjust and unrighteous conduct, and deceit.

5. The Commission of Light (5:11b–13)

- ❑ **“expose them”** → It is not enough for believers to avoid participation in the deeds of darkness. The “unfruitful deeds of darkness” aren’t “exposed” through juxtaposition with righteous living, or else there would be no need for this command. They must also “expose” them, which involves identifying these deeds as contrary to God and so demonstrate them as unfruitful and the reason why the wrath of God comes on the sons of disobedience.
- ❑ Commentators are split over whether the perpetrators of these deeds are unbelievers or believers.
 - ▶ On the one hand, the focus of these injunctions is the conduct of believers, and the term “expose” is used by Paul in other contexts for reproof of sinning believers (1 Tim. 5:20; 2 Tim. 4:2; Tit. 1:9, 13; cf. Matt. 18:15; Gal. 6:1; Rev. 3:19).

- ▶ On the other hand, the quotation in 5:14 seems to best describe the conversion of the unbeliever than the repentance of a wayward Christian.
- ▶ Probably best is to see it as applying to either. “Deeds of darkness,” whether performed by believers or unbelievers, should be exposed so that the guilty party may repent.
- ❑ **“shameful even to speak...”** → Despite how brazen unbelievers can be with sin (cf. Prov. 13:16), there are still some practices that sinners do in secret. The fact that these practices are so heinous as not to be mentioned is undoubtedly the reason he doesn’t itemize them or provide more details.
- ❑ **“exposed by the light...becomes visible”** → a general axiom that principles vv. 7–12. As the “children of light” (5:8) expose the “unfruitful deeds of darkness” (5:11), they bring them into plain view so that their nature and origins are visible to all.
- ❑ See also **Proverbs 9:8; Matthew 5:14–16; John 1:4; 3:20; 7:7; Acts 26:18**

6. The Call of Light (5:14)

- ❑ **“for anything that becomes visible is light”** → this continues the principle of 5:13 a step further. It is not enough to expose the “deeds of darkness.” Believers must have as their goal the conversion of the sinner. See **John 3:21**.
- ❑ Baugh: “The goal is not self-righteous glory of the saints over against the world but to challenge others also (v. 8a) to come into the light through faith in Christ.... The missions of the saints is not merely moral improvement of the world’s behavior but its wholesale transformation through the gospel as the power of the age to come unleashed in new creation light (6:14–20; cf. 2 Cor. 6:6).
- ❑ **“Therefore it says”** → Paul quotes what was most likely an early Christian hymn, although there are trace echoes of Isaiah 26:19; 60:1; and Jonah 1:6.
- ❑ **“Awake, O sleeper, and rise from the dead”** → the term “sleeper” is used of those in a state of spiritual and moral stupor (1 Thess. 5:6, 7, 10). These two lines constitute in poetic form the gospel call for the sinner to awake from spiritual death while God’s grace is still available to sinners. See **Isaiah 55:6–7** for an OT version.
- ❑ **“Christ will shine on you”** → the promise of the gospel. Christ, the light of the world (John 8:12), shines his light upon sinners as they repent of their sin and trust in him for eternal life. The light Christ shines is the light of redeeming and atoning grace which transforms the sinner from being one of the “sons of disobedience” into “sons of light” (John 12:36).