

Light and Darkness

Ephesians 5:1-14

Rev. Brian Bill

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According to a new book by Sarah McCammon called *The Exvangelicals*, younger generations of evangelicals are drifting away from the church and pushing it into a major identity crisis. This comes with reports of many who are deconstructing their faith. Alisa Childers, who is speaking at the Women's Iron Sharpens Iron conference at Calvary Church on April 13th, defines deconstruction this way: "*The process of systematically dissecting and often rejecting the beliefs you grew up with.*"

As several researchers have confirmed, about 30% of Americans select "none" when surveyed about what religion they identify with. Recently, a rising category has emerged among the younger generation called "done," referring to those who are simply done with church. Hearing about the "nones" and the "dones" can be discouraging.

At the same time, I'm seeing our students and young adults at Edgewood embracing their faith and living out loud for Jesus. I'm so grateful for how God is using Pastor Kyle, Pastor Chris, and Micah Kongkousonh, along with their team of servant leaders.

A couple weeks ago, Trevin Wax posted a very encouraging article called, *Rumblings of Revival Among Gen Z?* There's a link on "Sermon Extras" if you'd like to read it. On Tuesday, the pastoral team read this post out loud during our team time and celebrated what God is doing for His glory among this generation made up of ages 12-26.

Trevin begins with this quote:

Gen Z is spiritually starved. The disorienting circumstances of the last three years—a global pandemic, countless mass shootings...a contested election, rapid inflation, and widespread abuse scandals—created a famine of identity, purpose, and belonging. Gen Z is hungry for the very things the empty, desiccated temples of secularism, consumerism, and global digital media cannot provide, but which Jesus can.

Celebrating signs of spiritual hunger as evidenced in the Asbury Awakening, Trevin interviewed Pastor Mark Vance from Cornerstone Church, which launched the Salt Company, a ministry to college students. Their aim is to plant a thriving church and college ministry for the 400 major universities across North America. So far, there are 29 established network churches. Some of our young adults have been saved and disciplined through this ministry when they were in college.

Here are six signs of God at work:

1. **Conviction of sin among believers.** Repentance has become normal and is evidenced by a deep remorse and a heartfelt desire to turn from sin. He tells of a young woman who was living with her boyfriend and came under conviction during a message on holiness and decided to move out *that very night*. Sleep-walking Christians are waking up.
2. **Heightened desire for spiritual disciplines.** Young people are hungry to encounter God through ordinary means, such as deeper study of God's Word and a yearning to pray well and often.
3. **Missionary fervor and purpose.** Young people are experiencing an increased intensity of passion to live on mission for Christ. Many are renouncing physical comfort or better career prospects to join the work of kingdom expansion amid cultural opposition and the challenges of reaching the globally unreached.
4. **Ground zero for apologetics.** Almost everything for this generation now centers on the question of identity. The cultural craziness of the moment is an opening as many of them lament, "*I know what they're telling me at school about gender is wrong.*" They see close up the wreckage of the sexual revolution. They're hungry for someone to speak sanity into their lives and to testify to reality.
5. **Increase in conversions.** The conversion stories fall into two categories. For many, they've grown up around the gospel and have some kind of church experience, and yet suddenly they come alive as if the Spirit just electrified their hearts. For others, the background stories include dramatic circumstances, total turnarounds, and people far from God who are suddenly ready for salvation.
6. **Beautified church.** Many are coming to faith in Christ, partly because when sleepy Christians wake up and nominal Christians get converted, it beautifies the church. The church becomes an attractive and powerful place. In the end, the most powerful apologetic for Christianity is the presence of God's people. The display of grace-filled gospel Christianity is irresistible for many. The moral witness of the Christian faith shows why it's better to

desire the commitment and stability of marriage than to settle for casual hookups or the loneliness of pornography. To see the joy of intact families, of young people striving for holiness—this is desirable because it’s profoundly beautiful.

Here’s my message from this Baby Boomer to those who make up Gen Z: *“I see your zeal and long for it to spread to my generation. May it begin with me. You are not the future of the church; you are the church right now. The church needs you. I need you.”*

I want to prepare you for the preaching today because you might find it hard to hear. In fact, you may be tempted to push back or simply tune out. Just as the Holy Spirit put His finger on some things that needed to be corrected in my life and in yours last week, I’m confident He will do His work of convicting us of sin today. Please hear this. Any guilt we have over sin is meant to be gutted by the gospel. All judgment can be cleansed by Jesus who died in our place by taking the judgment we deserve. I’m praying for God to bring repentance to many of us and for rebirth to happen for those who are not yet born again.

Our process will be to walk through Ephesians 5:1-14. Here’s our main idea: *As followers of Christ, we must love like Christ, so we light up the world.*

1. Imitate God. We see this in verse 1: ***“Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children.”*** The word ***“therefore”*** ties this section to what comes before, reminding us how *a new life in Christ must lead to a new lifestyle*. Since Ephesians 4:32 says we’ve been forgiven, we’re called to ***“be imitators of God.”*** Literally, this is a command for us *“to mimic”* God. 3 John 1:11 says, ***“Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good.”*** Notice we’re called, ***“beloved children,”*** which shows God’s tender affection for those in His family.

In short, we’re to look like and act like God because He is our Father, and it is natural for children to imitate their parents. I remember a time I was out for lunch with one of our daughters and the waitress remarked that my daughter walks just like I do. I’m certain she did *not* see that as a compliment. On the other hand, many have commented how much I look and act like my dad, which *is* a compliment.

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2. Love like Christ. Let's ponder verse 2: ***“And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”*** This is now the fifth time we've seen the word **“walk”** in Ephesians. The word **“walk”** refers to our conduct and implies a steady step-by-step process. As followers of Christ, we're mandated to walk in love as Jesus stated in John 13:34: ***“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.”***

Our model for love is the love Christ has for us when He ***“gave Himself up for us.”*** Jesus offered Himself ***“for us,”*** meaning He died in our place, as our substitute. This weekend, we think of the significance of Palm Sunday. When Jesus came into Jerusalem on a donkey, He fulfilled Zechariah 9:9: ***“Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is He, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”***

At the exact time the Lamb of God entered Jerusalem to be sacrificed, the people were choosing their Passover lamb. While Jesus was being crucified, the sound of bleating lambs could be heard being sacrificed in the Temple.

Jesus, our Passover Lamb, was a ***“fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”*** Exodus 29:18 refers to a burnt offering as a ***“pleasing aroma.”*** Hebrews 9:26 says Jesus offered Himself willingly as the final sacrifice for our sins: ***“...He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.”*** I hope you'll join us for our Good Friday service as we focus on His substitutionary sacrifice and His voluntary, vicarious, and victorious death.

Passover reminds us only those who applied the blood of the sacrifice were “passed over” when the angel of death arrived. Friend, if you've never applied the blood of Jesus to your life, you will be in huge trouble. Repent and receive what Jesus did and have your sins passed over, or reject Him and your judgment will be certain.

The main point of verse 2 is we're to love like Christ loved us, which means we're to give ourselves to others, putting them first, in a self-sacrificing way. Our love is to be unconditional, undeserved, and unending. I like Steven Cole's definition: ***“Love is a self-sacrificing, caring commitment that shows itself by seeking the highest good of the one loved.”*** God's love is costly, caring, committed, conspicuous, and consecrating. The Bible reinforces the necessity of loving one another at least 13 times.

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3. Leave what is ungodly. Next, we're challenged to be sexually pure in verse 3: ***“But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.”*** Keep in mind these verses were addressed to Christians who came to Christ while living in the sinful seaport of Ephesus, a hotbed of immorality and sexual decadence. People worshipped the goddess Diana and ritual prostitution was a way of life.

Paul consistently held up the standard of purity in an impure world. We see this emphasis in Romans 1, 13; 1 Corinthians 5, 6, 7, 10; 2 Corinthians 6, 7, 12; Galatians 5; Ephesians 4, 5; Colossians 3; 1 Thessalonians 4; 1 Timothy 1, 3, 4, 5; 2 Timothy 3; and Titus 1, 2, 3.

The word ***“but”*** serves as a contrast, meaning we're to practice love, not participate in lust. Saints must not soak in sexual sin. True love is marked by what it gives, not what it gains. Let's look at the sexual sins mentioned in verse 3.

- **Sexual immorality.** This is the Greek word *“porneia,”* from which we get pornography, but actually includes all types of sexual sin, including incest, premarital sex, fornication, adultery, bestiality, and homosexuality. 1 Thessalonians 4:3 says, ***“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality.”***
- **Impurity.** This refers to what is *“dirty, corrupt, rotten, filthy, or lewd”* and was used of the pus around an infected wound. 1 Thessalonians 4:7 states, ***“For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.”***
- **Covetousness.** At first glance, we may wonder why covetousness appears as a sexual sin, but coveting refers to *“a consuming desire to have more, particularly that which does not belong to you.”* In context, it means *“greed for someone else's body.”* One commentator translates it as, *“insatiability.”* This is spelled out in the command not to covet in Exodus 20:17: ***“you shall not covet your neighbor's wife.”***

These sins ***“must not even be named”*** among believers who are called ***“saints,”*** which literally means, *“holy ones.”* As one pastor said, *“God's standards for moral purity are not up for popular vote.”* The idea is there should not even be a hint of unholy behavior as we read in Exodus 23:13: ***“Make no mention of the names of other gods, nor let it be heard on your lips.”***

To be morally pure, we must fight for purity by guarding our thought life and restricting the kinds of media we expose ourselves to. I recommend *Covenant Eyes* for internet accountability, which I use with my four sons-in-law to hold each of us accountable. Speaking of purity, I'll never forget a conversation I had with a 90-year-old man many years ago. He was lamenting his struggle with lust and wondered why he was still having to deal with it. This shows it is a life-long battle.

If you're dating right now, 1 Timothy 5:1-2 gives some parameters to put into practice. Make sure you're treating "***younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.***"

Three sins of speech are also spelled out in verse 4: "***Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.***" Paul mentions three ways our tongues can trip us up.

- **Filthiness.** This refers to obscene talk or shameful conduct, often considered to be crude or dirty language. It comes from the same root word as "disgraced."
- **Foolish talk.** We get our word "moron" from this Greek word and speaks of empty or vain language. It's the idea of talking without saying anything. Proverbs 17:28: "***Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent.***" Or, as Mark Twain said, "*Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and to remove all doubt.*" In the Bible, the fool is not someone who is *mentally* deficient but rather someone who is *morally* deficient.
- **Crude joking.** A crude joke is often witty, but vulgar. Hosts of award shows and late-night comedians traffic in this kind of language by twisting almost everything into innuendo or outright obscenity.

These kinds of sins "***are out of place,***" meaning, they are "*unseemly.*" I was talking to some friends from another state this week. The wife told me how she responded when she heard a fellow believer use a vulgar curse word. This is what she said to her friend, "*If you're going to talk like that, I can't continue our conversation.*"

It's always dangerous to joke about sin. Surprisingly, becoming a thankful person is a way to stop sinning sexually and with our speech. Notice how verse 4 ends: ***"...but instead let there be thanksgiving."*** Actually, that makes sense, because when we think we're entitled to something, or believe life is all about us, we can end up doing what we want sexually and saying whatever we want to say.

One pastor writes, *"To be thankful, you must be in submission to God's sovereignty over detail of your life. If you're grumbling or complaining, you're really saying that you know what's best for you better than God does...Satan tempted Eve by getting her to doubt God's goodness in withholding forbidden fruit from her."*

Thankfulness is the appropriate response to the good gifts of God and all He has given us by His grace. One commentator writes, *"If sin depreciates, love appreciates all that is holy, righteous, and good."*

In Romans 1:21, Paul explains how the root of sexual deviance is linked to dishonoring God coupled with a refusal to be thankful: ***"For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened."*** The antidote to immorality is to develop a thankful spirit.

Verses 5-6 are jarring and demand our full attention: ***"For 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."*** Those who imbibe in immorality as a way of life have no inheritance in the kingdom. This should be unsettling to us.

Let me be clear. While Christians may fall into these sins, true Christians will not persist in them. This refers to someone who is regularly immoral, impure, and unrepentant as a matter of practice as described in 1 John 3:8: ***"Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning."*** While genuine Christians may commit these sins, no genuine Christian can continue in such sins. David committed adultery, yet God forgave him when he confessed it.

What this means is if you're continuously living just to satisfy your sexual desires, the wrath of God will come upon you because it shows you are not a true believer. Let me be quick to say the Bible teaches eternal security, meaning if you are truly

saved, your salvation is eternally secure. But what this also means is you may think you've been saved, but maybe you're not if your life is characterized by immorality and impurity. Verse six refers to people like this as, "***sons of disobedience.***"

Just as love is an indication of a transformed life, a lack of love is evidence of an unredeemed life. A habitual lack of love for others may supply incriminating evidence that a person has not yet been born again. Someone put it this way: "*If love is not reigning in your heart, God may not be Lord of your life.*"

Dear friends, if we truly understood the biblical definition of love, Christians would be courageously committed to chastity. We are called to love one another, not to lust *for* one another. Don't allow our culture's definition of love to give you an excuse to participate in sex outside of marriage. I'm looking forward to the first weekend in October when Christopher Yuan will be here to lead our "Holy Sexuality" conference. To equip you in advance, we have a number of helpful books we've marked down to \$5 at our Café Resource Center.

Friends, God's wrath is real, and Hell is hot. While it's becoming popular even in Christian circles to hold to universalism, while denying the reality and eternality of Hell, we must remember this: "***Let no one deceive you with empty words.***" Let's keep our guard up and not be like Eve in Genesis 3:13: "***The serpent deceived me, and I ate.***"

Listen to 1 Corinthians 6:9: "***Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality.***" Lest you feel like this is overly harsh, verse 11 offers hope of change: "***And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.***" There's freedom and forgiveness for every sinner!

In verse 7, we're warned not to become "***partners***" with those who partake of the things which bring God's wrath. Numbers 16:26 says, "***And he spoke to the congregation, saying, 'Depart, please, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest you be swept away with all their sins.'***" Proverbs 13:20 reinforces this: "***Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.***" 1 Thessalonians 5:22 challenges us to "***Abstain from every form of evil.***"

If you're not married, but want to be, 2 Corinthians 6:14 commands you not to marry a spiritually mismatched mate: ***“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?”***

We're to imitate God, love like Christ, leave what is ungodly, and finally, we're to light up our world.

4. Light up your world. In verses 8-9 we're reminded to live differently: ***“For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true).”*** God has redeemed us from darkness and depravity to be a different and distinct kind of people. By our character and our conduct, we bring God's light into a very dark world.

Robert Deffinbaugh writes:

“Christians have undergone a dramatic transformation which is here described as having been transformed from darkness to light. In the Bible, salvation is never spoken of as a trivial matter. Those who are saved by faith in Christ are not merely improved, they are radically transformed...this change in our condition should be accompanied by a corresponding change in our conduct...becoming a Christian is not so much a matter of adding Christ to your life as it is abandoning your life to find true life in Christ...we will never be the same again...as though it were night and day.”

Notice, it doesn't say we were *in* darkness but that we were darkness itself. Colossians 1:13 says, ***“He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.”*** According to 1 Peter 2:9, born again believers have been called ***“out of darkness into His marvelous light.”***

We do more than reflect the Lord's light, this passage says we *become light ourselves* as we read in Matthew 13:43: ***“Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”***

The way to walk as a child of light is by learning what is acceptable to the Lord. Instead of doing what we want, we must ask, *“What does the Lord want in this situation? What would make Him smile? How do I bring Him glory?”* We see this in verse 10: ***“And try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.”*** To ***“discern”***

means, “to find out, to distinguish.” Philippians 1:10 calls us to “**approve what is excellent.**” Romans 12:2 says, “**Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.**”

In contrast, verses 11-12 call us not to participate in dark activities that are empty and unfruitful: “**Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret.**” Light has a way of revealing what darkness wants to conceal. There are at least three ways we expose deeds of darkness.

- Indirectly by living holy lives (1 Peter 4:3-4).
- Directly by speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).
- By not discussing dark things in detail (Romans Ephesians 5:12).

When we walk in the light, we end up exposing what is dark, so it becomes visible. We see this in verse 13 and the first part of verse 14: “**But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light.**” Light makes things easy to see. When we walk in the light, it makes the evil of the world around us easy to see.

The last part of verse 14 is a call for sleepy Christians to wake up: “**Therefore it says, ‘Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.’”** Isaiah 52:1 says, “**Awake, awake.**” Isaiah 60:1 serves as a spiritual alarm clock: “**Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.**” Romans 13:11 says, “**Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.**”

Kent Hughes tells of a man who bought his wife a jewelry box that glowed in the dark. After giving it to her, she turned out the light, but the box could not be seen. Both thought they had been cheated. Then, the wife noticed some French words on the box and asked a friend to translate them. The inscription said: “*If you want me to shine in the night, keep me in the light.*” If we hope to shine, we must spend time with the Savior, who is the light of the world. We need to be like Moses when he descended Sinai after being alone with God so our faces shine with the light of God. Psalm 34:5 says, “**Those who look to Him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed.**”

2 Corinthians 13:5 says, ***“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!”***

I want to circle back to the article I began with. I wonder if what we are seeing in Gen Z is happening right now in you and in me.

- **Conviction of sin.** If you sense conviction today, that’s a good thing because it will lead you to Christ. John 16:8 tells us how the Holy Spirit works: ***“And when He comes, He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.”***

Let’s spend time now confessing any sin the Lord is convicting us of.

- **Recommitment.** It’s time for sleepy Christians to wake up! Are you ready to confess and repent of your sins right now? If you’re struggling to move past your past, make sure to attend one of our four Easter services.
- **Conversion.** this is a call for you to be delivered from darkness. At the end of the Saturday night service last weekend, a man came up to me and said, *“I want to be saved. What do I need to do?”*

Invitation

If you’re ready to be saved, you could express your faith by praying with me quietly.

Lord, I confess I’m a sinner and I fall way short of Your standards. Thank You for paying the price for my sins and for dying on the cross as my substitute. I believe You rose again on the third day, and I affirm that You will return one day. I want to be ready for that, so now I repent from the way that I’ve been living and receive You into my life. Please forgive me for all my sins and make me into the person You want me to be. As best as I know how, I surrender all I am and all I have to You. If there’s anything in my life You don’t like, please get rid of it, and help me to live for You. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

New Members

9:00 David and Jacie Beebe (Chad)

Bob and Kris Huisenga (Chad)

10:45 Emma Lang (Kyle)