



A COLORFUL MYSTERY

CHURCH

A STUDY IN EPHESIANS

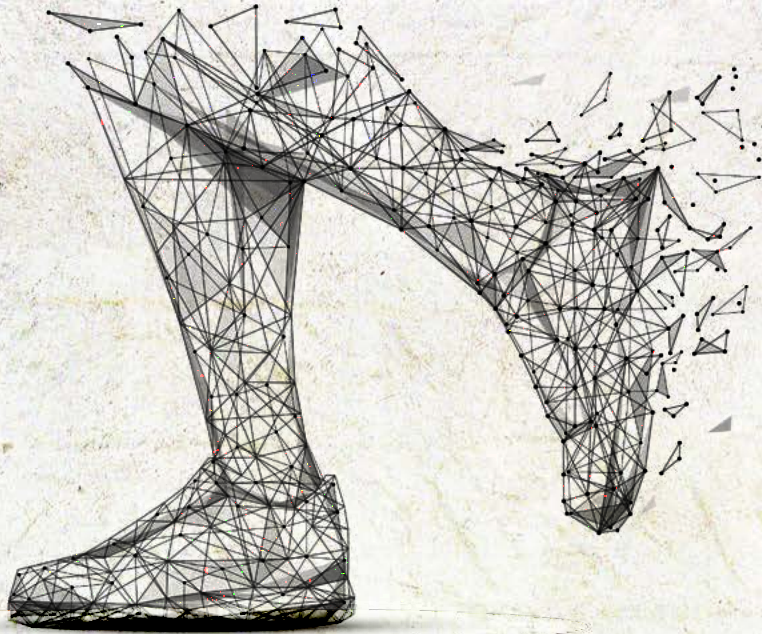
a field guide



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WALK IT OUT



DRAWING NEAR

Imagine someone in your church who claims to be a Christian. His testimony sounds legitimate and he has a long history of church involvement. It is common knowledge, however, that this person's life is permeated by a number of glaring, long-term sins. A friend of yours insists that if this person were truly a follower of Christ, they would turn away from their sins.

Another friend says that we all struggle with various sins and that their failings just happen to be among the list of highly visible sins that are frowned upon in Christian circles.

1] Do you think a person can be a Christian—walk in the light—and continue sinning in previous ways—waling in darkness? Why or why not?

Q THE CONTEXT

After describing God's amazing salvation and the incomparable riches that all believers in Christ possess (chs. 1-3), Paul turns his attention to the practical ramifications of the gospel. The old ways are gone; we are "new people." God has gifted us and has called us to live together in a supernatural entity called CHURCH. In unity and love, we are to live to the glory of God.

While seeing him on earth, we are to become like Him.

In the passage that follows, Paul describes how conformity to Christ contrasts with conformity to the world. The Ephesians believers lived in a pagan city of spiritual darkness, surrounded by morality, ungodliness and decadence. Almost all of them had been saved out of such a background, and they needed to be reminded of what it meant to live in the light.



KEYS TO THE TEXT

Darkness and Light: "Darkness" is the absence of light, and describes the character of the life of the unconverted as void of truth and virtue in intellectual and moral matters. The realm of darkness is presided over by the "power of darkness" (Luke 22:53), who rules those headed for "eternal darkness" (Matt. 8:12). Tragically, sinners love the darkness

(John 3:19-21). It is that very darkness from which salvation in Christ delivers sinners. The pure and illuminating light of God's Word exposes all the secrets of sin. God has called his children "out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

Imitating God: To "imitate" means to "mimic," or to copy specific characteristics of another person. The example of the Heavenly Father and the example shown by Jesus on earth are one and the same, since Jesus came to reveal the Father. Jesus' life was the practical demonstration of his ethical teaching. To His disciples He cried, "I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you" (John 13:15). This theme of the imitation of Christ pervades the New Testament letters, especially in the writings of Paul, who instructed his new converts to follow "the meekness and gentleness of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:1). Throughout the New Testament, Jesus is presented as the One who let us an example that we should follow in His steps (1 Peter 2:21).¹



UNLEASHING THE TEXT

Read 5:1–16, noting the key words and definitions to the right of the passage.

Ephesians 5:1-16¹

Walk In Love

1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.

2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. **3** But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. **4** Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. **5** 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. **6** Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. **7** Therefore do not become partners with them; **8** for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light **9** (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), **10** and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. **11** Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. **12** For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. **13** But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, **14** for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." **15** Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, **16** making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.

Key Terms

SEXUAL IMMORALITY (V.3) -

Any kind of sexual sin or immorality including fornication, adultery and homosexuality

FOOLISH TALK (V.4) - A unique word in the New Testament made up of two Greek words: Moros, from which comes moron = dull or stupid, and legos = to speak; intended to describe the conversation of someone intellectually deficient.

CRUDE JOKING (V.4) - sins of the tongue that include any speech that is obscene, degrading, suggestive, or immoral.

HAS NO INHERITANCE (V. 5) - Those with life patterns of habitual immorality, impurity, or greed cannot inherit God's holy kingdom.

TAKE NO PART (V.11) - literally "do not become a partaker together with others"

EXPOSE (V. 11) - The believer's act of confronting and correcting evil in his own life and within the church.

IT IS SHAMEFUL EVEN TO SPEAK OF THE THINGS (V. 12) - Some sins are so sordid that even describing them is morally and spiritually dangerous

LOOK CAREFULLY (V.15) - circumspectly, accurately, exactly, carries the idea of looking, examining, and investigating something with great intensity

MAKING THE BEST (V. 16) - redeeming, buying back; we are to buy all the time we have and devote it to the Lord

TIME (V.16) - not seconds, minutes, and hours, but a fixed, measured, allocated season; that is, our individual lifetimes as believers.

¹ESV Gospel Transformation Study Bible: Christ in All of Scripture, Grace for All of Life: English Standard Version. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.

2] What does it mean to be an imitator of God?

3] Paul spells out ways in which the Christian's walk of love contrasts with the counterfeit ideas of love found in the world. What are some of these contrasting actions or themes?

4] What words of warning does Paul give (vv. 5-7)? Why should we not participate in sinful deeds?

5] What is the significance of the "light and darkness" metaphor used by Paul? What does light do?



GOING DEEPER

Paul expounded often on what it means to walk in the light. Look for further insight as you read Galatians 5:16-26,

Galatians 5:16-26¹

Walk by the Spirit

16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. **17** For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. **18** But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. **19** Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, **20** idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, **21** envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. **22** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **23** gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. **24** And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. **25** If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. **26** Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

EXPLORING THE MEANING

6] What new terms for “light/darkness” are used here?. How does this passage from Paul’s epistle to the Galatians enhance our understanding of 5:1-14?

7] Put in your own words what it means to “walk in the Spirit.”

8] What new insights do these passages offer for how you can be in the world, but not of the world (John 17:11, 15-16)

9] What would the world say about a group of believers who were “doers” of this truth from God’s Word?



TRUTH FOR TODAY

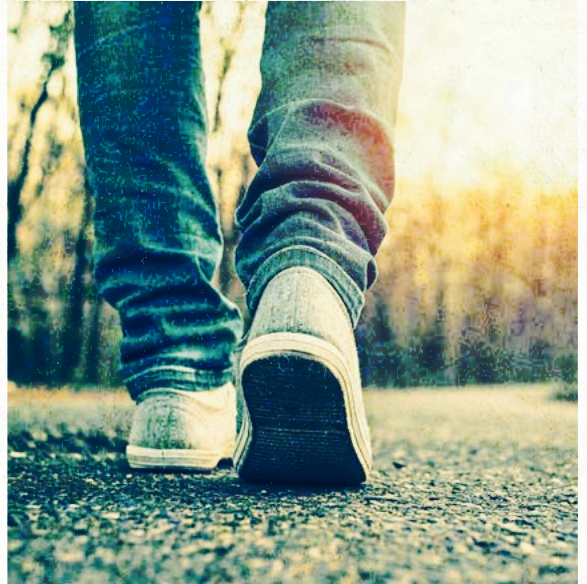
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Do you think a person can be a Christian—walk in the light—and continue sinning in previous ways—waling in darkness? Why or why not?

It is natural for children to be like their parents. They have their parents’ nature, and they instinctively imitate their parents’ actions and behavior. Through Jesus Christ, God has given us the privilege to become His children (John 1:12; Gal. 3:26). As Paul declared at the beginning of this letter, God “predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will” (1:5). Because our Heavenly Father is holy, we are made holy. Our positional holiness is immediate, but practical holiness takes time to grow in. As we grow in it, it affects how we live. Because the Father is kind, we too are to be kind. Because He is forgiving, we are to be forgiving. Because God in Christ humbled himself, we are to humble ourselves. Because God is love, as His beloved children we are to walk in love. This ability is not natural, however, but supernatural—requiring a new nature and the continuous power of the Holy Spirit flowing through us by obedient to God’s Word.¹

¹MacArthur, John. *Ephesians: Our Immeasurable Blessings in Christ*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007.

REFLECTING ON THE TEXT



9] History records that Alexander the great once discovered a coward in his army, a soldier who happened to be also named "Alexander." The legendary leader confronted the man and thundered, "Renounce your cowardice or renounce your name!" The implication for us is clear. We who bear the name of Christ need to reflect the character of Christ. As God's dearly loved child, what are some specific ways you can begin imitating your heavenly Father in your relationships?

10] Do you tend to tolerate evil and look the other way, or do you confront it and gently and in love when you see it in your church or world? Why?

11] As you reflect on this passage, what commands do you see that you are not obeying? What sins are you carelessly committing? Ask God to show you where you need to change, and to give you the strength to do so.

WALK it OUT

