

BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY EIGHTEEN

This Little Light: Is It Really Mine?

Ephesians 5:6–14

When God makes Himself known, He often appears in bright, burning, brilliant light. Everything around Him lights up because God is light. I'm not surprised, then, that when Paul tells us to imitate God, he says, "Live like children of light."

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

NO one has to teach children to imitate their parents. Like ducklings waddling in line behind mama duck, children naturally do what their parents do. Toddlers cradle their baby dolls just like mommy cradles her newborn or, when they grow up a little, try to cast the line from their toy fishing rod just like daddy casts his line. When Paul wrote, "Imitate God . . . because you are his dear children" (Ephesians 5:1), we understand Paul's point. As children, we yearn to imitate our Father—the question is, how?

First, as we learned in the previous study, we "walk in love" (5:2 NASB). After all, "God is love" (1 John 4:8), so it follows that we love people as He loves them. In our current passage, Paul takes his point a step further. Not only is God love, "God is light" (1:5). So, second, Paul tells us, "Walk as children of Light" (Ephesians 5:8 NASB).

Just as we look to Jesus as our example of God's love in action, we also look to Him as our model of how to shine God's light. Christ came from heaven "as a light to shine in this dark world" (John 12:46). So, as we love others with the love of Jesus, we shine by reflecting Jesus' light. In this study, we'll examine more specifically what it means to "live as people of light" (Ephesians 5:8), following Christ's example as we walk in our Father's footsteps.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

At the dawn of creation, God spoke His first recorded words in Scripture: “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3), and light from heaven shone in the darkness. God’s good light has been scattering the darkness of sin and ignorance ever since. Take a moment to invite the same divine light to enlighten your mind and illumine your soul as you open God’s Word.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read *Ephesians 5:6–14* and highlight on paper or with your cursor Paul’s warnings, “Don’t participate” (Ephesians 5:7) and “Take no part” (5:11). These warnings identify the two main sections of the passage; all the points hang on or flow from these commands.



Observation: Walk in the Light, Expose the Darkness

A good practice in the observation stage of *Searching the Scriptures* is to write a list of everything you notice and to look for any patterns.¹ If you recall, in Ephesians 4, Paul listed behaviors to throw off followed by behaviors to put on. “Throw off your old sinful nature” (Ephesians 4:22), he wrote, and then “put on your new nature” (4:24). Paul continues this throw-off-and-put-on pattern in our current passage. He gives negative commands followed by positive commands, and, in between, Paul explains his reasons. The formula could be stated like this: *Don’t do this, for this reason; instead, do this, for this reason.*

In the spaces below, write down the negative commands and the reasons and the positive commands and the reasons.

“Don’t Participate”—Ephesians 5:7

Verses	Negative Commands and Reasons	Verses	Positive Commands and Reasons
<i>Ephesians 5:6–8</i>		<i>5:8–10</i>	



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“Take no part”—Ephesians 5:11

Verses	Negative Commands and Reasons	Verses	Positive Commands and Reasons
<i>Ephesians 5:11a, 12</i>		<i>5:11b, 13–14</i>	

Now summarize in your own words what you observed. First, what was Paul urging his readers *not* to do and why?

Second, what was Paul urging his readers *to* do and why?



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You may recall from our first study, the church in Ephesus was in one of the largest centers of idolatry in the ancient world. The massive Temple of Artemis towered over the city, drawing multitudes of worshipers seeking favor from the goddess whom they revered as mother of all life. Demonic darkness and wanton immorality engulfed the city.

Read about the cultic practices in the temple in your Bible dictionary or consult the online article, “*Diana; Artemis*,” in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* at biblestudytools.com. What would it have been like for the Ephesian believers to live in such a spiritually dark city?

Considering the idolatry in Ephesus, we can better understand the urgency of Paul’s command: “Take no part in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness” (Ephesians 5:11). Many former idolators in the church had friends and relatives still practicing cultic rituals. How tempting it must have been to slip back into their past sinful ways.

But Paul reminded them, in so many words, “You are not children of the darkness; you are children of your heavenly Father! So, walk as God’s children, in His light.”

Don’t participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness. After all, at night it gets confusing to people in the dark when they see that you live just like them. But when they see you shining, they see there’s hope, there’s a way to get out. —Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Meaning of “Walk as Children of Light”

Let’s examine the meaning of Paul’s command, “Live as people of light!” (Ephesians 5:8), which is also translated, “walk as children of light” (5:8 NASB). First, Paul defined *light* by what it produces: “for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth” (5:9 NASB)—in contrast to the immorality of the “greedy person [who] is an idolator, worshiping the things of this world” (5:5).



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List a few examples of goodness, righteousness, and truth that you see in your everyday life.

Second, *light* not only describes our behavior it defines our new identity: “you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord” (Ephesians 5:8 NASB). Notice, Paul declared we *were* darkness—in much the same way as he previously stated, “Once you were dead” (2:1). Until God “gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead” (2:5), we had no spark of *life*. Neither did we have a spark of *light* until God gave us light. Now, because of our new position “in the Lord,” we *are* light.

Paul referred to our new life and light in a Christian poem that may have been lines from an early church hymn based on Isaiah 60:1:

“Awake, O sleeper,
rise up from the dead,
and Christ will give you light.” (Ephesians 5:14)

What do you think this poem means, and how may it have been used in first-century Christian practice? Consult your sources for help with the answer, or for an online resource, read the notes on this verse from [William Barclay’s commentary on Ephesians](#) at [studylight.org](#).



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Third, as we walk as children of light, we expose “the worthless deeds of evil and darkness” (Ephesians 5:11). Not only will evil deeds be exposed but also the “evil intentions” of the people who do the deeds (5:13). In his commentary on Ephesians, Chuck Swindoll clarified what it means for believers to “expose” the wrongdoing of others.

Paul didn’t intend that we parade other people’s sins before a self-appointed moral court. . . . Rather, our light is meant to reveal what’s there by way of contrast. By simply engaging in deeds of light, you and I expose the deeds of darkness. When we live honestly, we expose dishonesty. When we live with integrity, we shock the person who pads his or her expense account or wastes time at the office.²

Paul may have had in mind the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus told His followers to be light bearers in their dark world. Let’s gain insight into Paul’s words by comparing them with Jesus’ teaching.



Correlation: Lights for All to See

After delivering the eight beatitudes, Jesus illustrated how His disciples who obey His teaching will influence those around them. He compared His disciples’ influence to salt, and then He gave the following illustration about light.

“You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.” (Matthew 5:14–16)

If we authentically live like Jesus, people will see His light in our actions. Like cities on a hill, we won’t be able to hide Jesus’ light. And like lamps in a dark room, people will see the Father in the light of our lives and will be drawn to worship Him with us.

Considering the location of the church in Ephesus in a major metropolis known for its idolatry, how do you think the believers to whom Paul wrote would have understood Jesus’ teaching?



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What insight does Jesus' teaching give to Paul's words?

What was it like for us living in the darkness? Well, stop and remember. We didn't know the way out. We were selfish, and we did a number of things we were ashamed of. We didn't have the power to change, but then Christ came. He turned our darkness into something that other people in the darkness see as another way to live. They see goodness, righteousness, and truth—but those qualities are not from us. They are from the Light. —Chuck Swindoll



Application: Reflections of God's Light

Light has two purposes: to dispel the darkness and attract people to it. In a similar way, as we walk as children of light, we expose the sins of people who live in darkness and we draw them to God. Like people lost in a dark cave, unbelievers grope around, not knowing whether they will pitch over a ledge or ever find their way. When they see light in us, their disorientation changes into direction, and their fears melt into hope as they follow its guidance to safety and home.

The light we shine, however, doesn't originate inside us. We are like the moon that lights up the night sky. We merely reflect a greater light, the light of God's Son!

We have so much to offer people who dwell in darkness. Why would we partner with them or take part in their dark deeds when we can live as light? Is God exposing any deeds of darkness that He can help you shed? Ask Him right now to throw off these sins of your old life and put on God's new radiant ways.



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How can you “live as people of light” (Ephesians 5:8)? What might be a simple act of goodness, righteousness, or truth you can do or say to shine God’s light in your world?

The light you reflect may be small, a flicker of a kind deed or glimmer of a loving word. But set against the darkness, it will light up the whole room! So, shine! Those lost in darkness need to see God’s light in you.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, as I close my eyes to pray, I shut out physical light so I can focus on the spiritual light of Christ. He is my light-giver and my life-giver. Thank You, Father, for sending Your Son into this world to rescue me from the dark cave of my sin and lead me into the light. Now I am light—Your light—in a world still lost in darkness. May Your light shine through me today. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).”
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*, Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 8 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2015), 271, 272.

