

# Children of the Light

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Today's lesson will be a departure from our study in Revelation. The Ephesian church is the only one of the seven addressed in Revelation to have an in depth presence in the New Testament. We'll spend some time today focusing on a passage of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Paul wrote this letter from Rome in about 60 AD, seven years after he founded the church. Today's lesson will come from that letter as it exhorts the church in Ephesus to persevere and refrain from the prevalent pagan activities of that city. The Ephesians were called to live as Children of the Light, not of the darkness that pervaded that city. From this passage we will see the development of a predominate characteristic of the Ephesian church mentioned in Revelation.

Ephesus was the center of worship for the pagan goddess Artemis. Along with worship of this idol came all kinds of debauchery. Worship included drunkenness, consumption of unclean foods, and sexual immorality with temple prostitutes. This highly cosmopolitan city was a crossroads of different cultures with different values. The worship of Artemis brought a completely different dimension to the "acceptable" lifestyle of those who inhabited the city. In his letter to the church of Ephesus, Paul exhorted them to live up to a higher standard beyond the depraved culture that surrounded them.



Read Ephesians 5:1-17.

Paul calls the Ephesians to imitate God. Just as children imitate their parents, as Christians we are called to imitate God. Love is the all important characteristic of God that Paul tells the Ephesians to imitate. God demonstrated his love for mankind through Jesus' death as a sacrifice on our behalf. Because of his love for us he was willing to go to the cross on our behalf.

Romans 12:10 tells believers to *"be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves."* This is the model of how Christians within the church are to relate with one another as one body, esteeming one another, delighting in the works and of achievements of one another, encouraging one another, and strengthening one another. Even as Jesus died on the cross for the sake of love, Christians too may be called to make that final sacrifice for the sake of love for one another and for Him. Persecution to the point of death was a reality Christians faced on a daily basis in Ephesus. The only way this body of believers can stand up to the persecution facing the church was as a united body. Paul exhorts the Ephesian church to relate to each other as would a family, in unity as one body. And not as the Gentiles do.

Verses 3-7 point out the ways of the Gentiles that are inappropriate within the body of Christ. The behavior of the gentiles breeds bad fruit, the results of which, if practiced within the church, will destroy those interpersonal relationships that Jesus strove to model and taught to uphold. According to 1 Peter 2:9-10 The church is called to be *“a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God.”* Living the way of the Gentiles is incompatible with living as the chosen people of God. Chosen means sanctified, set apart for the holy and specific use of God. Living as do the gentiles defiles us as God’s chosen instrument to reach the world. We become unusable by God. We defile and dirty ourselves, that as lamps for the light of God, we so darken ourselves that the light can no longer shine through, and worse we appear as hypocrites.

Love never degrades others or places things above humans as each of these behaviors do. Paul condemns first evil deeds: sexual immorality, impurity, greed. These behaviors are abhorrent to God and are improper for God’s Holy people. Christians are called to imitate Christ, who is holy. There should not be even a hint, or a whisper of such activity associated with anyone in the body of Christ. These vices portray selfishness and lack of concern for others, the complete antithesis of Jesus’ self-sacrificing love for us. Sexual immorality tears at the heart of the most intimate relationship between a man and a woman. It tears down a sacred trust and destroys that relationship. It hurts and tears apart families and friendships. Greed is covetous, desiring the possessions of others and is in fact idolatry. It places objects and wealth above all else, the pursuit of which displaces God as the center of a Christian’s life. All of these activities reveal a heart not dedicated to God, but to self. A person who chooses to participate in these behaviors has not chosen to be part of God’s Kingdom. They are not cleansed of sin, justified before God and sanctified for his holy work. They will not inherit the Kingdom of God. Believers dedicated to the Kingdom of God should not participate in the activities of the ungodly because they have been sanctified to God’s holy purpose through Christ Jesus. Peter says in 1 Peter 1:14-16 *“As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; <sup>16</sup> for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”*

Paul goes on to condemn improprieties in speech. He says there should be no obscenity, indecency, corrupt or coarse speech coming forth from our mouths, as do the ungodly. Foul language and coarse subject matter are common place in daily life. They go almost unnoticed. But there should be no place for it in a Christian’s conversation. If the Lord’s presence is going to shine through us and make itself know to others, it cannot be seen through the obscenities and foolishness of coarse language. Hebrews 12:14-15 says, *“Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see*

*the Lord. <sup>15</sup> See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many."*

Christians are not forbidden contact with unbelievers, just the opposite. As Christians we are to be a light or beacon of God's love to the unbeliever. Verse 6 contains a warning in having contact with non-believers. Paul tells them *"Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient."* Empty words have no truth in them. Empty words are designed to draw the faithful into a snare of disobedience. They are excuses used to justify sinful behavior leading to the idea that there are no consequences to living just as the world does. Taking part in the culture and lifestyle of the world around you is tempting; sweet, smooth words from an unbeliever can make it difficult to refrain from things you know are not acceptable in the eyes of God. Immoral choices are just that, choices. Each time we chose to do something we know is wrong, we close the door on God's voice in our heart. We become well practiced at ignoring our conscience. Each immoral act becomes easier than the preceding until we've found ourselves in a mire of depravity. Consistent depraved behavior may indicate a heart that is not devoted to God, and not one who truly believes in God's saving Grace. The door to repentance is left open to us, but consistent and repeated depravity will cause us to close that door, not God. Christians need to use care and not accept the "empty words" of the Godless when it comes to activities we know are unacceptable to God. We are called to lead unbelievers to Christ, but we must guard ourselves from the influences of the unbeliever. The Lord's view on sin is a serious matter, and ought to be taken seriously by all Christians. We ought to be living to God's high standard, not the standard set by the world who has not accepted Lord's offer of redemption.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 says *"It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit."*

It is God's will that we should be sanctified. It is his will that we hold ourselves accountable to his holy and righteous law. He makes provisions for us when we fail and are repentant, but it is his will that we make every effort to control ourselves and live not as the world does. Christians who persevere in an immoral lifestyle, knowing full well that it is abhorrent to God are setting themselves up for God's judgment. Persistent immorality can lead to a rejection of faith, a rejection of the Holy Spirit's guiding influence. These are not man's laws that we strive to embrace, they are God's. The willful disobedience of God's

laws is the rejection of God. Don't think God won't seriously take issue with unrighteous behavior in his children! God will correct and discipline bad behavior in all his children. He will not disown us, but he will discipline us. We will suffer the temporal consequences of our sins. He will not take away our salvation if we are truly dedicated to him and have placed our faith in Christ's saving death on the cross and his resurrection. But our sins have a rippling effect upon those within our sphere of influence, and God will not put an end to our influence if we obstinately continue down a sinful path.

We are called to be an example to the world of what it means to be a child of God. We are called to be holy, just as He is holy. If our behavior reflects that of the world around us, we do not stand out as children of God, we are not living examples of God's love and grace. We will fail to share the gospel message with anyone in our sphere of influence and we may even turn others away from Christ by our hypocrisy. If we are living by the standards of the world, then anyone who *might* come to faith through us, will think our behavior is acceptable, that God doesn't really care about how we comport ourselves. By our own wrong example we become a false teacher modeling behavior that is abhorrent to our righteous and holy God. Their faith will be weak, and they will succumb to temptation because we have not been a faithful example of holy living and obedience to God's law.

Immorality is not to be taken lightly or silently in the body of believers as it may be seen as acceptable behavior. We are called to know what behavior pleases the Lord and live accordingly. We are called to expose the immoral behavior of believers, leading them gently and lovingly back to a right relationship with God. Paul says to the Corinthians, another very worldly church, in 1Cor 5:12-13: "*What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. 'Expel the wicked man from among you.'*" In other words, don't worry about the sins of the unbelieving, God will deal with that, but deal with the sinful among you. If they refuse to change their ways, they need to be removed before their immorality corrupts the body of Christ.

God needs believers who will stand up for what is right and true, not turning a blind eye to the actions of another believer. Some in the Ephesian church were tolerating the sinful activities found in its society. They were turning a blind eye on the "*fruitless deeds of darkness*", the activities and pleasures that result in sinful choices. They were losing balance on the slippery slope of sin. Paul was calling them to wake up to what was going on in the body of believers in their community. Christ's light of truth and righteousness will expose the evil invading the church. Immorality within the body of the church will lead to its destruction, not necessarily by God's judgment or wrath, but by the destructiveness of the sin itself being allowed to expand and corrupt without objection.

Paul commands in verse 15, *“Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.”* The Ephesians lived in a very corrupt, depraved culture, not unlike our own. The corruption of sin and evil spreads quickly when left unchecked. A little sin tolerated now leads to a mire of depravity and evil later. Paul says to live wisely. Live obediently to the will of God for our life, which is to be holy (*“Be holy, because I am holy.”* 1 Peter 1:16) and merciful (as Jesus said in Luke 6:36: *“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”*). Make choices that honor God even when they go against the prevailing opinion of acceptable behavior in the world. Be discerning of the smooth and tempting words of unbelievers. Discern what is true and right not only in God’s judgment, but also in the motives of unbelievers. He says *“the days are evil”*, because just as the worldly society in Ephesus was depraved, so is the worldly society today. We too must live “not as unwise, but as wise, making the most of every opportunity...” We must take every opportunity to share the light of God’s love and mercy, his offer of redemption and salvation. We can only do that if we live wisely and not as the world lives. In this letter to the Ephesians, Paul emphasizes that the faithful in Christ should comport themselves with the love modeled by Christ (v.2) and bearing the fruit of the light which is goodness, righteousness, and truth (v. 9).

The direct results of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians bears its fruit in Christ’s commendation regarding the Nicolaitans in Revelation 2:6. The Ephesian Church, at the time of John’s recording of Christ’s epistle, praises them for their unwavering fight against the Nicolaitans and their intolerance of sin. They took to heart Paul’s teaching and took a stand against immorality and heresy within the church. Sadly, several of the other six epistles we will be studying reveal a weak stance against sin and immorality within the body of Christ. Instead of taking a firm stance against worldly behavior, some of the churches not only tolerated it, but some embrace it.