

Cutting Ties with Darkness

Message 18

3.19.22

Ephesians 5:1–14 (CSB)

Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children, ²and walk in love, as Christ also loved us and gave himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God. ³But sexual immorality and any impurity or greed should not even be heard of among you, as is proper for saints. ⁴Obscene and foolish talking or crude joking are not suitable, but rather giving thanks. ⁵For know and recognize this: Every sexually immoral or impure or greedy person, who is an idolater, does not have an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

LIGHT VERSUS DARKNESS

⁶Let no one deceive you with empty arguments, for God's wrath is coming on the disobedient because of these things. ⁷Therefore, do not become their partners. ⁸For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light—⁹for the fruit of the light consists of all goodness, righteousness, and truth—¹⁰testing what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹Don't participate in the fruitless works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹²For it is shameful even to mention what is done by them in secret. ¹³Everything exposed by the light is made visible, ¹⁴for what makes everything visible is light. Therefore it is said:

Get up, sleeper, and rise up from the dead,

and Christ will shine on you.

1. You were once darkness, but now you are light.

A. Darkness and light are not conditions we step in and out of as we want.

1. They are our identities.

2. We are either darkness, or we are light.

B. Paul writes to believers.

1. These men and women have not grown up in church.
2. They grew up and were raised in the shadows of temples.
 - a. Their earliest memories were of holidays to false gods.
 - b. The highlights of their lives, like weddings, the birth of children, and other memories, revolved around a way of life that was no longer compatible with Jesus.
3. The Ephesus believers knew the darkness.
 - a. A life of idolatry, adultery, gossip, and slander is what Jesus saved them from.
 - b. Salvation is not only future, ensuring eternal life after we die.
 - c. Salvation is also present, empowering us to live a resurrected, eternal life today.
4. Salvation is not a slow transition from darkness into light.
 - a. Salvation is a sudden and immediate transportation from a kingdom that has NO light into a kingdom that IS light.

C. Jesus changes us from people of darkness into people of light.

1. Even though we practice this imperfectly, this is our calling and privilege.
2. We are called to walk in light, producing the fruit of light.

2. What does light produce?

⁸For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light—⁹for the fruit of the light consists of all goodness, righteousness, and truth—¹⁰testing what is pleasing to the Lord.

A. Light produces fruit.

1. Grant Osborne wrote:

Fruit denotes harvest, so these are the natural results of the work of the Triune Godhead in our lives. Just as light is a necessary ingredient in the growth of plants, so the light of God enables us to grow in these attributes. The presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives must produce certain fruit, the natural result of life in the Spirit.¹

2. What are we to produce?

- a. Goodness
- b. Righteousness
- c. Truth

B. What is goodness?

1. We all have different views on goodness.

- a. For example: some of you are still living a life that thinks mustard is tasty and good.
- b. You are deceived and still in darkness...

2. Biblically speaking, because we are to be measured by the fullness of the stature of Jesus, we need to know what "good" is biblically.

- a. A helpful definition: the quality of moral excellence; especially as a quality that is not stagnant, but actively working itself out.²
- b. Goodness is something that is growing, fresh and not stale or rotting.
- c. A believer who is producing "goodness" is bringing life to those around them.

¹ Osborne, Grant R. 2017. Ephesians: Verse by Verse. Osborne New Testament Commentaries. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press. 168-169

² Brannan, Rick, ed. 2020. In [Lexham Research Lexicon of the Greek New Testament](#). Lexham Research Lexicons. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

a. Not death, not decay, not cursing.

b. But life, growth, and blessing.

3. We were saved from a disposition that leads to death to a disposition that leads to life for ourselves and those around us.

a. A good life brings wholeness and goodness to those around them.

b. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is life and freedom.

c. And He wants to produce that in us and through us also.

C. What is righteousness?

1. The simplest answer is "right living."

a. Righteousness is to be in right standing with God, which is only possible through Jesus.

b. "adherence to what is required according to a standard;"³

c. "a status of legal rectitude that satisfies the moral requirements of God's character."⁴

2. In this context: The light of fruit produces a life that is pleasing to the Lord.

a. When the light works in me, what comes out of me pleases Jesus.

b. Righteousness conflicts with the world's understanding of goodness and truth.

c. The standard of righteousness is based upon pleasing Jesus.

³ Brannan, Rick, ed. 2020. In [Lexham Research Lexicon of the Greek New Testament](#). Lexham Research Lexicons. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

⁴ Ibid

d. If it doesn't please Jesus, then it isn't good, righteous, or true.

D. What is truth?

1. "the *truth* in view here has both content and ethical dimensions to it, forthright and honest behaviour. It is both thinking and acting in accordance with a true and authentic way of living."⁵

2. Truth is not only the right information but also the right heart.

3. This becomes clear in the context of Ephesians

1. 4:25 (CSB) ²⁵Therefore, putting away lying, **speak the truth, each one to his neighbor,** because we are members of one another.

2. The right information must be given with goodness and righteousness in mind.

E. In these ways we test to see what pleases the Lord.

1. What we do and how we live has an effect upon God.

2. We can live in a way that pleases God.

3. Or we can live in a way that repels God.

4. How we walk and live matters.

5. Paul captures this reality by admonishing the believers to not participate in darkness.

⁶Let no one deceive you with empty arguments, for God's wrath is coming on the disobedient because of these things. ⁷Therefore, do not become their partners. ⁸For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light—⁹for the fruit of the light consists of all goodness, righteousness, and truth—¹⁰testing what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹Don't participate in the fruitless works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹²For

⁵ Bock, Darrell L. 2019. [*Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*](#). Edited by Eckhard J. Schnabel. Vol. 10. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. London: Inter-Varsity Press.

it is shameful even to mention what is done by them in secret. ¹³Everything exposed by the light is made visible, ¹⁴for what makes everything visible is light.

3. What does it mean to participate in fruitless works of darkness?

A. Acts 19 tells us of the first time Paul was in Ephesus.

Acts 19:11 (CSB) ¹¹God was performing extraordinary miracles by Paul's hands,

Acts 19:18–20 (CSB)

¹⁸And many who had become believers came confessing and disclosing their practices, ¹⁹while many of those who had practiced magic collected their books and burned them in front of everyone. So they calculated their value and found it to be fifty thousand pieces of silver. ²⁰In this way the word of the Lord spread and prevailed.

1. One of the keywords here is "disclosing."

a. To disclose is to expose and reveal.

b. Many in the Ephesus church had participated in mystery religions and sects.

c. Not only did they publicly worship at temples, but behind the scenes, they were involved in all sorts of demonic and evil practices, magic, and witchcraft.

2. But when they got saved, they started confessing and disclosing.

a. Confession shows a change of heart and identity.

b. "Disclosing their practices" was to expose the darkness to light and render the powers powerless.

3. The new believers in Ephesus understood that they could no longer participate in the darkness they left behind.

a. The value of the books they burned was 50,000 pieces of silver.

b. Yet, what they found in Jesus was worth it.

c. Because of this demonstration, "the word of the Lord spread and prevailed."

B. When we expose our darkness to the light, we are demonstrating what it means for the word of the Lord to spread and prevail.

1. A Bible, unopened, is not spreading and prevailing.

2. A person who proclaims Christ on Sunday while living in darkness during the week is not demonstrating the prevailing word of the Lord.

3. But every time a person repents and walks away from participating in darkness, we see an example of the power of God.

C. What level of involvement is necessary to be classified as participation?

1. Many of us have moved passed the breaking of the Ten Commandments stage.

2. Perhaps we have already put away the stealing, or the lying, or the murder.

3. As God prepares us, His Body and Bride, for what He has in store for us, the questions become more personal.

D. At the beginning of the semester, Pastor Larissa and I made a bold leadership move:

1. We challenged the teens that wanted to go deeper to sacrifice a few things, and one of those things was R-rated movies.

a. There was some hesitation, and rightfully so.

b. But I believed that if our teens were willing to give this up, it would create space in their lives for God to move.

c. I can honestly say, watching these teens the past few months pray, worship, preach, and serve has been some of the greatest highlights in my life.

2. Weekly, they set the pace in repenting and confessing sin as the Lord leads.

E. Question: If the Apostle Paul was here today, what would he say about what many of us adults participate in?

1. More importantly, what does the Holy Spirit think?

2. Are we positively testing what is pleasing to the Lord, or are we testing His grace and mercy?

a. We are grieving the Holy Spirit?

b. Are we asking the Spirit of God to go where He said He won't go?

Apply: Are we participating in the fruitless works of darkness?

A. Here are the hard questions:

1. Does watching people have sex on television constitute participation?

2. Does listening to strings of profanity by my favorite YOUTUBER make me their "partner?"

3. If you could see Jesus walk through your house, and peruse your phone, what would He think and feel?

4. Because the truth is, He lives in us through the Holy Spirit.

a. We can grieve Him, and we can please Him.

b. As partakers in the light, we are called to please Him.

B. Some exposures you have no control over.

1. You don't control your co-workers.

2. You don't the songs on the radio in a restaurant or conversations in Wal-Mart.

3. But much of what we expose ourselves to is self-initiated.
4. **The first glimpse is an accident, the second is a sin.**

C. Paul warned the Ephesians: Do not go where darkness took you!

1. Do not return to the Temples with its pornography and cult prostitution.
2. Do not return to the sacrifices for the Emperors of Rome.
3. My dear friends, PLEASE be careful with how you live, walk, and lead.
4. Ephesians 5:15 (CSB)

¹⁵Pay careful attention, then, to how you walk—not as unwise people but as wise—

D. **Perhaps it seems that the Apostle Paul and Pastor Paul are being hard on you today.**

1. So I close with this story.

Closing STORY: Seventeen Inches

In 1996, Coach Scolinos was 78 years old and five years retired from a college coaching career that began in 1948. He shuffled to the stage to an impressive standing ovation, wearing dark polyester pants, a light blue shirt, and a string around his neck from which home plate hung — a full-sized, stark-white home plate.

Seriously, I wondered, who in the hell is this guy?

After speaking for twenty-five minutes, not once mentioning the prop hanging around his neck, Coach Scolinos appeared to notice the snickering among some of the coaches. Even those who knew Coach Scolinos had to wonder exactly where he was going with this, or if he had simply forgotten about home plate since he'd gotten on stage.

Then, finally ...

“You’re probably all wondering why I’m wearing home plate around my neck. Or maybe you think I escaped from Camarillo State Hospital,” he said, his voice growing irascible. I laughed along with the others, acknowledging the possibility. “No,” he continued, “I may be old, but I’m not crazy. The reason I stand before you today is to share with *you baseball people* what I’ve learned in my life, what I’ve learned about home plate in my 78 years.”

Several hands went up when Scolinos asked how many Little League coaches were in the room. “Do you know how wide home plate is in Little League?” After a pause, someone offered, “Seventeen inches,” more question than answer.

“That’s right,” he said. “How about in Babe Ruth? Any Babe Ruth coaches in the house?”

Another long pause.

“Seventeen inches?” came a guess from another reluctant coach.

“That’s right,” said Scolinos. “Now, how many high school coaches do we have in the room?” Hundreds of hands shot up, as the pattern began to appear. “How wide is home plate in high school baseball?”

“Seventeen inches,” they said, sounding more confident.

“You’re right!” Scolinos barked. “And you college coaches, how wide is home plate in college?”

“Seventeen inches!” we said, in unison.

“Any Minor League coaches here? How wide is home plate in pro ball?”

“Seventeen inches!”

“RIGHT! And in the Major Leagues, how wide home plate is in the Major Leagues?”

“Seventeen inches!”

“SEV-EN-TEEN INCHES!” he confirmed, his voice bellowing off the walls. “And what do they do with a a Big League pitcher who can’t throw the ball over seventeen inches?” *Pause.* “They send him to *Pocatello!*” he hollered, drawing raucous laughter.

“What they *don’t* do is this: they don’t say, ‘Ah, that’s okay, Jimmy. You can’t hit a seventeen-inch target? We’ll make it eighteen inches, or nineteen inches. We’ll make it twenty inches so you have a better chance of hitting it. If you can’t hit that, let us know so we can make it wider still, say twenty-five inches.’”

Pause.

“Coaches ...”

Pause.

” ... what do we do when our best player shows up late to practice? When our team rules forbid facial hair and a guy shows up unshaven? What if he gets caught drinking? Do we hold him accountable? Or do we change the rules to fit him, do we widen home plate?

The chuckles gradually faded as four thousand coaches grew quiet, the fog lifting as the old coach’s message began to unfold. He turned the plate toward himself and, using a Sharpie, began to draw something. When he turned it toward the crowd, point up, a house was revealed, complete with a freshly drawn door and two windows. “This is the problem in our homes today. With our marriages, with the way we parent our kids. With our discipline. We don’t teach accountability to our kids, and there is no consequence for failing to meet standards. *We widen the plate!*”

Pause. Then, to the point at the top of the house he added a small American flag. “This is the problem in our *schools* today. The quality of our education is going downhill fast and teachers have been stripped of the tools they need to be successful, and to educate and discipline our young people. We are allowing others to widen home plate! Where is that getting us?”

Silence. He replaced the flag with a Cross.

“And this is the problem in the *Church*, where powerful people in positions of authority have taken advantage of young children, only to have such an atrocity swept under the rug for years. Our church leaders are widening home plate!”

I was amazed. At a baseball convention where I expected to learn something about curveballs and bunting and how to run better practices, I had learned something far more valuable. From an old man with home plate strung around his neck, I had learned something about life, about myself, about my own weaknesses and about my responsibilities as a leader. I had to hold myself and others accountable to that which I knew to be right, lest our families, our faith, and our society continue down an undesirable path.

“If I am lucky,” Coach Scolinos concluded, “you will remember one thing from this old coach today. It is this: if we fail to hold ourselves to a higher standard, a standard of what we know to be right; if we fail to hold our spouses and our children to the same standards, if we are unwilling or unable to provide a consequence when they do not meet the standard; and if our schools and churches and our government fail to hold themselves accountable to those they serve, there is but one thing to look forward to ...”

With that, he held home plate in front of his chest, turned it around, and revealed its dark black backside.

“... dark days ahead.”⁶

As the Apostle Paul wrote:

⁸ For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light—⁷

Thanks be to Jesus whom makes this possible!

Thanks be to Jesus who has redeemed me from darkness.

Thanks be to Jesus who invites us to Himself today.

⁶ <https://www.sperrybaseballlife.com/stay-at-17-inches/>

⁷ [*Christian Standard Bible*](#). 2020. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.