

Immanuel Lutheran Mail Ministry



Ephesians 5:5-21 *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. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, ²⁰ giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.*

You Are Light, Be Bright (Be Who You Are)

"Be yourself." That's what they say, isn't it? "Be who you are!" "Be the best you that you can be!" "Be true to yourself." "You do you." There's a lot of that going around these days, but what does that even mean? Who are *you* anyways? Sometimes when people say that they're just speaking about your interests, your personality, and so on. Like, "If you like things that people find nerdy, that's ok! Be you!" But other times, that type of encouragement is used as an excuse for sin. It's said in a way to encourage people to live however they want, to do whatever they feel like doing, and oftentimes to indulge in sins—but "it's fine, because you're just being yourself." That's the implication anyways.

When that's the case, and people encourage one another to indulge in sins, sins like the ones mentioned by Paul in the first verse of our text—sexual immorality and covetousness—then that phrase, "Be yourself," "You do you," is exactly what Paul is warning against in the next verse. When he says, "**Let no one deceive you with empty words.**" What Paul means is that people are going to use empty words to try to deceive you into thinking that things like sexual immorality and covetousness are no big deal. That you can "be you," and "do you," and there's no judgment coming.

And boy, was Paul right. Hasn't that become the anthem of our world today? "Be you." "Love who you want to love," "Look after yourself first because no one else will," "If you want to do something, go and do it," "If you see something you want, go out and get it!" And so, we see all of the world chasing after everything they want, whether that be money or sex or power or fame, all the while running to the chorus of the world, "Be yourself! You do you!"

Now, it's pretty easy to identify this type of depravity when we look all around us at the world and everything that's trending the wrong direction in our culture today. It's easy to look out and see the rampant sexual immorality and condemn that, recognizing it as wrong, yet all the while finding ways to excuse ourselves for our own sexual sins and lustful thoughts. We separate ourselves from the world in this way and figure our faults aren't *as bad*. Or consider what Paul says about covetousness. Did you notice he said, "**Everyone. . . who is covetous (that is an idolater.)**"

If you think about the Old Testament people of Israel, really all you have to do is open to a random page in the front part of your Bible and there's a good chance you might find a section talking about the Israelites turning aside. They were always turning aside, following the Baal's, the Ashtoroth, and Molech. We read those sections, and it's easy to think, "Oh those Israelites, there they go again with their idolatry. Why do they keep doing that?"

Well, Paul says that covetousness is just as bad. He identifies covetousness with idolatry, just like that! The idolatry of the Children of Israel which brought God's wrath upon them, that's not suddenly gone among us! Covetousness is idolatry. That means whenever you are discontent, whenever you grumble, whenever you are jealous, whenever you can't help but focus on the things you want but don't have—Paul says *you* are an idolater. And Paul says that such a person has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. So do not let the world deceive you with its empty words.

I don't know if you've seen the commercials, they're run by Rocket Mortgage, and they involve the actor Tracy Morgan telling a couple some things he's "pretty sure" of in a variety of situations. So, in one scene he's holding up a red polka-dotted mushroom in the forest and says, "I'm pretty sure it's not poisonous," meanwhile the man collapses dead in the background. Or another scene where he's driving the family across a drawbridge that is being raised up and says, "I'm pretty sure we can make it," and the next second they're hurtling off the bridge into the water. Those are empty words too. Well, in this empty philosophy of the world, encouraging people to do whatever makes them feel best, "Be you; it's ok as long you're being yourself," the results are far worse. For Paul reminds us in our second verse, ***"Because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience."***

With this statement, Paul is picking up an idea that he began in chapter 2, where he wrote, ***"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience--³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind."***

(Ephesians 2:1-3) Children of wrath! Not Children of God. Children under the impending *wrath* of God—like being caught in the path of a tornado with no way out and no shelter. Paul says, ***"So were we all."*** And so still are all those whom Paul calls here, ***"The sons of disobedience,"*** those who live their lives solely on the basis of things like sexual immorality and covetousness and encourage everyone else to live the same because you're just being yourself, "And that's not wrong, is it?" That's a bad place to be, a dark place to be.

And that's where you *were*, Paul says, but it is not where you *are*, and it is not *who* you are NOW. That's why he writes, ***"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."*** Think what a powerful and encouraging passage that is. First, he says that at one time you were darkness, you were where they are now. You used to be there, you used to be that. Not just *in* the darkness, but darkness itself. Dead in your sins, darkened in your understanding, and awaiting a black judgment that you didn't even know was coming. And that's what the world is calling you to be when it says, "Be yourself."

But Paul says that's not what you are anymore. He says, ***"You are light."*** Notice, he doesn't say, "You are *of* the light," he doesn't say, "You are *in* the light," nor does he say, "You are *partially* light." He says, ***"You are light."*** Completely! Entirely! How can that be? We just mentioned some examples of sins that we still commit! You know your hearts; you know there are some places of your heart that are truly dark and shady and filthy. So how can Paul say, ***"You are light"?***

The key of course is the conclusion to that phrase, ***“You are light. . . in the Lord.”*** Jesus says, ***“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”*** (John 8:12) And in 1 John, the Apostle explains this concept a little bit more, where he writes, ***“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*** (1 John 1:8-9) And then he also writes, ***“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”*** (1 John 1:7)

God has rescued you from the domain of darkness and brought you into the kingdom of His beloved Son! He has shined the light of forgiveness on you, and therefore has made you light. For where Christ’s light shines, the darkness of sin and death disperses. For on the cross, Jesus was where *you* were. In the blackness, under the impending wrath of God against your sin. On the cross, Jesus was *who* you were, because He became sin for you, that you might become the righteousness of God in Him. And that means that in Jesus, you are light. Because you are who *He* is. When the Father looks at you now, He sees the light of Jesus, and that’s *all* He sees. That Paul says, is who you are, already! Completely! Your holiness, your salvation, your righteousness—they’re a done deal. Complete in Jesus, even now, by faith. And so he says, ***“Walk as children of light.”***

What does that type of life look like? He explains it in the next couple of verses, to do that which is good and right and true. To discern what is pleasing to God, literally to *test* things, and ask yourself if this is God pleasing, “Should I really be doing this or not?” And then to ***“take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.”*** In other words, he says, ***You are light, be bright. (Be who you are!)*** It’s like that children’s song, “This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine!”

Now, when Paul says that your Christian walk should involve exposing the works of darkness, he’s not saying here that you should go around and find those people who are in the darkness of sin and just tell everybody else about them, expose them to other people. He doesn’t mean go and snicker about it behind their back. He certainly doesn’t mean go and join them in what they’re doing. He says, ***“it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret.”*** Therefore, expose it . . . to them! You are light! You have the light of the good news; you have the Word of God to expose to that person the danger of their soul. You know the danger, for you used to be where they are now, and you’ve been brought out by the light and have been given the light to do the same for them.

This is what he’s talking about when he says, ***“When anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible.”*** It’s like when you pick up a rock and there’s a worm squirming underneath, it’s been exposed. That’s how our souls are before God’s law, we squirm, we don’t like it. And yet, by God’s law, He exposes that dark sin within us, we squirm, we repent, and He prepares us for the good news that that sin has been taken care of by Christ Jesus! So He exposes us and brings us into His light!

So then, Paul continues. ***“Anything that is made visible is light.”*** His point is that shining this light of law and Gospel, people can be brought from darkness to light. This is what Paul said was his very mission in life, in Acts 26, he said, that God sent him ***“to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.”*** (Acts 26:18)

Imagine that you lived in a world that was completely dark. No light whatsoever, but there’s danger everywhere. There’s pits, there’s cliffs, there’s razor sharp rocks and other dangers, and YOU have a light! Everyone around you is crying out in despair, in darkness. You have a light. Are you going to turn it off and join them? Or are you going to shine it on them? Don’t join them in the darkness and don’t leave them there either. ***You are light, be bright! (Be Who You Are)***

That's also the idea as Paul continues in verse 16. ***"Making the best use of the time because the days are evil."*** You know, there's a lot of things that you can't do in darkness. If you're trying to finish up some project outside in the yard and night comes, you have to abandon it for the next day. You might try to rush and finish it in the dark for a little while, but eventually you realize that you just can't see and have to quit. Sometimes we look around the world today, there's darkness and evil all around, we might be tempted to think, "What's the point? I can't accomplish anything in this darkness. Might as well just call it quits." But Jesus is reminding you here, you AREN'T in the darkness. You are light! Jesus said it this way to His disciples, ***"Night is coming,"*** the end is coming, the end of the time when you can work in the kingdom, the end of the time to shine your light to other people, He says, ***"Night is coming, when no one can work,"*** but right now, it is day! You have been redeemed! You have been brought into the light! You are in the day of Jesus Christ, and therefore, you are called to make the best use of the time in these evil days, by showing that light to other people.

But we can get in the way of that, too. You know, there's that saying, "Your actions speak so loudly, I can't hear what you are saying." That can happen to pastors, that can happen to Christians who want to share the good news of full and free forgiveness in Christ. We want to share the good news, but our sinful actions speak so loudly that it drowns out the message. So, Paul gives us some practical examples in the last verses about what we can do so that our actions don't drown out God's Word.

He speaks about drunkenness, one of those things that people do in the night when they figure there's nothing else to do with the time. Getting drunk with them—that's not making the best use of the time! Rather than being filled with wine, Paul says—getting drunk—be filled with the Holy Spirit, making melody in your heart to the Lord with Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Another thing you can do is in verse 20, ***"Giving thanks always for everything."*** Remember, earlier Paul mentioned covetousness as one of the things bringing God's wrath. Thanksgiving is the opposite of that. Thanksgiving always. . . for everything, Paul says! It's all encompassing. You break your leg? Thanksgiving always for everything. You don't get what you want? Thanksgiving always for everything. That doesn't come naturally to us. Living in the darkness, you complain always for everything. Because we're so focused on everything we want, and nothing's ever the way we think it should be. But the key is as Paul says, ***"giving thanks always . . . in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."*** That is, because of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done, we have reason to give thanks always for everything! In the light of the knowledge that the darkness of our sins has been eradicated, in the light of the sure hope of eternal life in heaven, we have ample reason for thanks always.

And that leads finally to verse 21. ***"Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ."*** Another thing that doesn't come naturally to the world. The world sometimes talks about "meeting each other half-way." "You give up this and I'll give up that." That's not submitting to one another. That's a kind of fake love that is only willing to give up so much ground and only if the other person gives up ground too. It's just another way of ensuring I at least get some of my own way.

Submitting to one another, that only comes out of reverence for Christ. See how he keeps coming back to Christ? Thanksgiving in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. Because it all comes back to who you are in Christ. When the world says be who you are, they mean "never submit to anyone, insist on your own way, get what you want, complain and grumble if things aren't just the way you want them to be." When Paul says, "Be who you are," he means you are light in the Lord. You have been forgiven. You have been cleansed. You are pure. You are righteous. You are holy, and salvation is yours! Be who you are. Be bright, because Christ is your light. Amen.