

The Book of Ephesians, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 9: Walk in Love and Light

Ephesians 5:1–14

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This passage gives two governing images for the Christian walk: love and light. Paul calls believers to imitate God as beloved children, walking in love measured by the self-giving of Christ, and to live as children of light who once were darkness itself. The teacher should help the class feel both the warmth of the call (we imitate a Father we love) and its seriousness (we have a new identity that demands a new way of living). Christian ethics here is not cold rule-keeping but the family likeness of those who belong to God.

The doctrinal edge of the lesson is the seriousness of persistent sin. Paul states plainly that no sexually immoral, impure, or covetous person has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God, and he warns, let no one deceive you with empty words (vv. 5–6). The teacher should handle this honestly. It confronts any teaching that treats grace as a license for ongoing, unrepentant sin, the empty words that say a believer may live in immorality and still be secure. Holding this together with the gospel of grace, the message is that those washed by Christ are called and enabled to leave such sins behind (1 Corinthians 6:9–11), and that a life given over to the works of darkness is incompatible with belonging to the kingdom. Note also the present-kingdom language: the kingdom of Christ and God is a present reality believers are in, not only a future hope.

Formationally, this is a searching passage about purity, speech, entertainment, and the company we keep. The aim is to lead students to examine where they have quietly partnered with the darkness, in their habits, their words, their private thoughts, and to step into the light. Paul ends with a wake-up call, and the lesson should end the same way: a summons to arise from spiritual drowsiness and let Christ shine on us.

Question 1

Student Question:

In verses 1 and 2 Paul calls us to be imitators of God as beloved children and to walk in love as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us. What does it mean to imitate God, and what does the self-sacrifice of Christ tell us about the kind of love we are called to?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul's command is breathtaking: be imitators of God (v. 1). We are to copy God Himself. But notice the qualifier that keeps it from being crushing: as beloved children. We imitate not as

anxious servants trying to earn favor but as loved children who already belong, naturally taking after their Father.

The specific trait to imitate is love, and the pattern is precise: walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us (v. 2). The measure of Christian love is not sentiment but sacrifice. Christ's love took Him to the cross; ours is to be self-giving in the same direction.

Paul calls Christ's sacrifice a fragrant offering to God. Self-giving love, costly and unglamorous as it often is, rises to God as something beautiful. When we love sacrificially, we are not only helping people; we are offering worship.

Help the class hold together the warmth and the cost. We imitate God because we are loved children, and the imitation will look like a cross, a love that gives itself for the good of others.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Imitating God as beloved children, not anxious servants
- Love measured by the self-giving of Christ
- Sacrificial love as a fragrant offering to God
- Warmth and cost held together in Christian love

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean to imitate God as a beloved child?
- How does Christ's sacrifice set the measure for our love?
- How is this different from obeying rules out of fear?

Question 2

Student Question:

The measure of love here is Christ giving Himself up for us. Where is your love for others still mostly about your own comfort and convenience, and who is God calling you to love more sacrificially?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses the cost of love. It is easy to love in the abstract and convenient to love those who love us. Paul's standard, Christ giving Himself up, exposes how much of our love is really about our own comfort.

Invite students to identify a relationship where their love stops at convenience: a difficult family member, a needy neighbor, an irritating coworker, a spouse during a hard season. Sacrificial love means seeking their good at real cost to ourselves.

Help them name the specific cost, time, money, comfort, pride, control. Naming it makes the call concrete. Then encourage one act of self-giving love this week toward the person God brings to mind.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Love that stops at convenience
- Identifying a relationship that calls for sacrifice
- Naming the specific cost of love
- Concrete acts of self-giving

Discussion Prompts

- Where is your love still mostly about your own comfort?
- Who is God calling you to love more sacrificially?
- What would self-giving love cost you there?

Question 3

Student Question:

In verses 3 and 4 Paul says sexual immorality, impurity, covetousness, and crude or filthy talk must not even be named among the saints, but rather thanksgiving. Why do you think Paul links sexual sin, greed, and corrupt speech together, and what does it mean that these should not even be named among God's people?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul lists sexual immorality, impurity, and covetousness together, and adds filthiness, foolish talk, and crude joking (vv. 3–4). At first these seem unrelated, but they share a common root: they are all forms of taking and consuming for the self, the opposite of the self-giving love just described.

Sexual sin and greed both grasp at what is not ours for our own gratification; corrupt speech treats people and holy things as objects of amusement. Where love gives, these sins take. That is why they have no place among those learning to imitate a self-giving God.

The phrase must not even be named among you sets a high bar. Paul is not merely forbidding the acts; he is calling for a community where such things are not even treated as normal or amusing. The replacement he offers is striking: instead of crude talk, thanksgiving. A grateful heart is the antidote to a grasping one.

Help the class see that this is not prudishness but a different orientation of the whole self, from taking to giving, from grasping to gratitude.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Sexual sin, greed, and corrupt speech as forms of taking, not giving
- The contrast with the self-giving love of Christ
- A community where such sins are not even normalized
- Thanksgiving as the antidote to a grasping heart

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Paul link sexual sin, greed, and crude speech together?
- What does it mean that these should not even be named among the saints?
- How is thanksgiving an antidote to a grasping heart?

Question 4

Student Question:

Paul sets a high standard for what fills our speech and imagination. How do your words, your entertainment, and your private thoughts measure up to a life in which impurity is not even named, and where is God calling you to a higher standard?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question brings purity home to speech, entertainment, and the thought life, areas where the surrounding culture exerts constant pressure. Paul's standard, that impurity not even be named among the saints, challenges the casual acceptance of crude and impure content as normal entertainment.

Help students examine honestly what fills their words, their screens, and their private imagination. We often hold a double standard, condemning sin in theory while consuming it for amusement. Paul calls for consistency.

Be pastoral, not merely scolding. The goal is not shame but a higher and better way, replacing what defiles with what is good and grateful. Encourage one concrete change, perhaps in what they watch, how they speak, or where their mind is allowed to wander.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Purity in speech, entertainment, and the thought life
- The pressure of the culture toward casual impurity
- Consistency between what we condemn and what we consume
- Replacing the impure with the good and grateful

Discussion Prompts

- How do your words, entertainment, and private thoughts measure up to Paul's standard?
- Where have you accepted as normal what God calls impure?
- What is one concrete change God may be calling you to make?

Question 5

Student Question:

In verses 8 through 10 Paul says you were once darkness but now are light in the Lord, and he calls us to walk as children of light, discerning what is pleasing to the Lord. What does it mean that our very identity has changed from darkness to light, and how should that change the way we live?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul makes a profound identity statement in verse 8: at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. He does not merely say they were in darkness and are now in light; he says they were darkness and are now light. Their very nature has changed in Christ.

This is the ground of the command that follows: walk as children of light. The call is not to become something foreign but to live out what they now are. Behavior is meant to match identity. Light shines; that is simply what it does.

Paul describes the fruit of light as all that is good and right and true (v. 9), and he calls them to discern what is pleasing to the Lord (v. 10). The Christian life is a continual discernment, testing choices by whether they please the Lord and reflect the light.

Help the class grasp the encouragement in this. They are not trying to manufacture light by effort; they are light in the Lord, and walking in the light is the natural expression of a changed nature, pursued by grace.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- A changed identity: you were darkness, now you are light
- Behavior matching identity
- The fruit of light as goodness, righteousness, and truth
- Discerning what pleases the Lord

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that your very identity has changed from darkness to light?
- How should that change the way you live?
- What does it look like to discern what pleases the Lord in daily choices?

Question 6

Student Question:

Paul says we are now light, yet there may be areas still in shadow. Where in your life is there a gap between who you are in Christ and how you are actually living, and what would it look like to walk in the light there?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question names the gap many believers feel between who they are in Christ and how they actually live. Paul says we are light, yet there are often areas still in shadow, places we have not yet brought under the light of Christ.

Help students identify one such area, a habit, a relationship, a hidden practice, an attitude, where their living lags behind their identity. The light of Christ has not yet fully reached it.

Walking in the light there begins with honesty, bringing the hidden thing into the open before God, and often before a trusted brother or sister (compare 1 John 1:7). Darkness loses its power when exposed to light. Encourage one step out of the shadows this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gap between identity in Christ and actual living
- Areas still kept in shadow
- Honesty as the first step into the light
- Darkness losing power when exposed

Discussion Prompts

- Where is there a gap between who you are in Christ and how you live?
- What area of your life is still kept in shadow?
- What would walking in the light there look like?

Question 7

Student Question:

In verses 11 through 13 Paul says to take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead to expose them, because the light makes everything visible. What should the Christian's relationship to the surrounding darkness be, and how is exposing darkness different from simply condemning people?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul tells believers to take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them (v. 11). The Christian is not to be a partner in the darkness, but neither is he to ignore it. The light has a role: it makes things visible (v. 13).

Exposing the works of darkness is primarily the work of a life lived in the light. A truthful life exposes deceit simply by contrast; a pure life exposes impurity; a generous life exposes greed. The light reveals not mainly by lecturing but by shining.

Distinguish this from a harsh, condemning spirit. Paul is not calling for self-righteous fault-finding but for lives so clearly good that they reveal the emptiness of the works of darkness. Where words are needed, they should serve to bring people out of the dark, not merely to denounce them.

Help the class see the balance: genuine separation from the deeds of darkness, combined with a redemptive aim. We expose the darkness so that people might come into the light, as the next verse will say.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- No partnership with the works of darkness
- A life in the light that exposes by contrast
- Exposing darkness without a condemning spirit
- A redemptive aim: drawing people into the light

Discussion Prompts

- What should the Christian's relationship to surrounding darkness be?
- How does a life in the light expose darkness without merely condemning people?
- How can exposing darkness serve to draw people toward the light?

Question 8

Student Question:

Paul warns against becoming partners in the works of darkness. Where are you most tempted to quietly go along with what you know is wrong, and what would it mean to step into the light instead?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question probes the temptation to quiet complicity. Most of us are not tempted to lead in evil, but we are tempted to go along, to laugh at what we should not, to stay silent when we should speak, to participate passively in what we know is wrong.

Help students name where this happens: at work, among friends, in family settings, online. Partnership with darkness is often a matter of small compromises rather than dramatic sins.

Stepping into the light may mean declining to participate, gently speaking up, or simply living so consistently that our example sets a different course. Encourage one specific resolve to stop going along and start shining.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Quiet complicity as a common form of partnership with sin
- Small compromises rather than dramatic sins
- Declining to participate and speaking up
- Consistent example as a form of light

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you most tempted to quietly go along with what is wrong?
- What would stepping into the light look like there?
- What small compromise might God be asking you to end?

Question 9

Student Question:

In verses 5 through 7 Paul says no sexually immoral, impure, or covetous person has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God, and he warns, let no one deceive you with empty words. What does Paul teach here about the seriousness of persistent, unrepentant sin and the inheritance of the kingdom, and how does this confront the deceptive idea that a person can live in ongoing sin and still be saved?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal center of the lesson, and the teacher should treat it with both honesty and pastoral care. Paul writes, 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 (v. 5). Then he warns, let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience (v. 6).

Paul is teaching that a life characterized by these sins is incompatible with belonging to the kingdom. He is not speaking of a believer who stumbles and repents, but of those who give themselves over to immorality, impurity, or greed as a settled way of life. Such a life, unrepented, has no inheritance in the kingdom, whatever a person may claim to believe.

The warning, let no one deceive you with empty words, is pointed. There were teachers then, as there are now, who use grace as a cover for sin, assuring people that how they live makes no ultimate difference. Paul calls this deception and empty words. The grace of God never licenses ongoing, unrepentant sin. To teach that a person may live in immorality and still be secure in the kingdom is precisely the deception Paul forbids.

Yet the teacher must keep this firmly tied to the gospel of grace, or it will crush rather than warn. The parallel passage is 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, where Paul gives a similar list and then says, and such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified. The

point is not that the immoral are beyond hope, but that those who come to Christ are washed and called to leave such sins behind. The inheritance belongs to the cleansed, not to those who cling to the very sins from which Christ died to free them.

Two doctrinal notes deserve mention. First, the phrase the kingdom of Christ and God reflects the present reality of Christ's reign; believers are in His kingdom now. Second, this passage reinforces what the previous lesson taught about the seal of the Spirit: salvation is preserved through ongoing faith and obedience, not by a presumption that conduct no longer matters. Teach the class to fear the deception of empty words and to walk as those who truly belong to the kingdom of light.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- A life given over to immorality, impurity, or greed as incompatible with the kingdom
- The difference between settled, unrepentant sin and the believer who stumbles and repents
- Empty words and false grace that license sin (let no one deceive you)
- The inheritance belonging to the washed and cleansed (1 Corinthians 6:9–11)
- The present kingdom of Christ and God
- Salvation preserved through ongoing faith and obedience, not presumption

Discussion Prompts

- What does Paul teach about persistent, unrepentant sin and the inheritance?
- What are the empty words Paul warns us not to be deceived by?
- How does 1 Corinthians 6:9–11 keep this warning tied to the hope of the gospel?

Question 10

Student Question:

Verse 14 calls out, awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you. Looking back over this whole passage, name one specific way the Lord is forming you through it, and one area where you sense Him calling you to wake up and step into the light.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone rests on verse 14, which sounds like an early hymn: Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you. Paul ends not with condemnation but with a summons to wake up and be flooded with the light of Christ.

The image is of spiritual drowsiness. It is possible to be a believer and yet half-asleep, dull to sin, dim in love, drifting through the Christian life. The call is to wake up, to rouse ourselves to the seriousness and the joy of walking in the light.

Note the promise attached: Christ will shine on you. The one who awakens does not climb toward the light by sheer effort; Christ Himself shines on the one who turns to Him. Grace meets the waking sleeper.

Press for a personal response. Ask each student to name one way this passage is forming them, and then one area where they sense Christ calling them to wake up, a drowsy conscience, a neglected love, a compromise tolerated too long, and to step into His light.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Spiritual drowsiness as a real danger for believers
- The summons to wake and arise
- Christ shining on the one who turns to Him
- Grace meeting the waking sleeper

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth from this passage most needs to shape you this week?
- Where is Christ calling you to wake up and step into the light?
- What does it mean to you that Christ will shine on the one who awakens?