

Eph 5a Walk as Children of Light

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Overview

Eph 4-6 amplifies the third thing that Paul wants the believers to understand (1:18), “the hope of his calling,” the hope to which God has called us. Paul develops this hope in three exhortations to walk:

1. 4:1-16, walk in the unity, exploiting the gifts God has placed in the body.
2. 4:17-5:6, walk not as the Gentiles.
3. 5:7-6:9, walk as children of light. This section in turn has two parts:
 - 5:7-21 teaches, through three contrasts, that the Lord’s light in which we walk should enable us to discern between good and evil, the will of the Lord and the way of the world. It closes with an injunction to submit ourselves to one another.
 - 5:22-6:9 works out the implications of that submission in three relationships: husband-wife, parent-child, master-servant.

This section differs from the previous in two ways.

1. That dealt with specific sins (theft, impurity, wrath). This deals with the general principle: walk in the light of the Lord.
2. That focused on horizontal mechanisms for maintaining godliness: speak the truth one to another; don’t be deceived by false teachers. This reminds us of vertical resources, the light of God’s illumination.

Compare these sections:

	4:1-16, Walk in Unity	4:17-5:6, Walk not as Gentiles	5:7-6:9, Walk in Light
Vertical	God’s Gifts	God’s Example	God’s Light
Horizontal	Ministry among Believers	Avoiding Wicked Examples	Submission among Believers
Focus	General Injunctions	Specific Sins	General injunctions

In 5:7-21, we have:

- the basic mechanism: our walk in the light of Christ should
 - produce a life well pleasing to the Lord (7-9), and
 - be a reproof to the unbelievers (10-14).
- Two contrasts in how we should walk:
 - not as fools but as wise (15-17),
 - not as drunk but as filled with the Spirit (18-21).

7-14, The Mechanism

Structure: mainly alternation, but with inclusio in the reference to their dawn.

7, Command to separation: “Be not fellow-partakers.”

8a, Recollection of their spiritual dawn.

8b, Command to walk in the light

9-10, Explanation of the fruit of a godly life.

11a, Command to separation: “Have no fellow-share.”

11b, Command to reprove the darkness

12-13, Explanation of the reproof that light brings

14, Recollection of their spiritual dawn.

Consider each of these elements separately.

7, 11, Command to Separation

Note the repeated injunctions to separation, with compounds of *sun-*.

- 7, “be not **partakers with** them” (μη συν γινεσθε **συμμετοχοι** αυτων)
- 11, “have no **fellowship with** [them]” (και μη **συγκοινωνειτε** τοις ...)

To bring out the force of the repetition, we could translate, “be not fellow-partakers with them; have no fellow-share with them.” These introduce two separate results of walking in the light.

We are “saints,” separated unto God. Our mission in this world requires us to stand apart from that world.

There is a progression in these two commands.

Be not partakers.--The first forbids us to participate in evil with those in the world, “walking in the counsel of the ungodly.”

Have no fellowship.--The second forbids any approbation or assistance to others who do them, “standing in the way of sinners, sitting in the seat of the scornful.” If we associate ourselves with the unfruitful works of darkness, even though we ourselves are not engaging in them, we are lending our support and approval.

- Rev 18:4 commands believers to come out of Babylon, that they have no fellowship with (AV “be not partakers of”) her sins.
- 2 Cor 5:14 forbids close bonds with unbelievers. The word family ετεροζυγ- comes from Lev 19:19, thus with special reference to mixed marriages.
- 1 Cor 5:9-13 is an important point of calibration. Removing ourselves completely from the world is not possible (cf. John 17:15, “5 I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil”). But we ought not to be complacent about sin in the body. This is an important distinction.

In a moment, he will take the command a step further, and enjoin us to reprove them.

8a, 14, Spiritual Dawn

The metaphor of light and darkness is ubiquitous in the Scriptures to describe the difference between the kingdom of God and our great adversary:

- God's first creative act, in Genesis 1, is to say, "Let there be light" (Gen 1:3).
- At the coming of Messiah, "The people that walked in darkness [the tribes of Zebulon and Naphthali] have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined." (Isa 9:2)
- Again, the prophet exhorts Israel, "1 ¶ Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. 2 For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. 3 And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.." (Isa 60:1-3)
- Though these promises are to Israel, in addition, he is "a light of the Gentiles" (Isa 42:6; 49:6).
- The OT closes with the promise, "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall" (Mal 4:2).
- Of the coming of the Word of God, John writes, "4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men. 5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. 9 That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."
- Jesus said of himself, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness" (John 12:46).
- Paul describes the process of salvation thus: "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6).
- The Father "hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." (Col 1:13)
- He has "called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." (1 Pet 2:9)
- It is written of the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:23-25), "And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb *is* the light thereof. 24 And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. 25 And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there."

Twice in this section Paul applies this picture to our salvation.

- 14 is not a quote from scripture. It is usually understood to be a citation from a hymn of the early church, perhaps based on Isa 60:1-3 and Mal 4:2. The picture reminds me of my youth. My bedroom was directly over the kitchen. In the morning my mother would bang on the ceiling of the kitchen with a broom handle and call me to get up and greet the new day. So here, the unbeliever is pictured as in a deadly sleep, and hears the voice of God

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announcing that the Sun of Righteousness has arisen and the new day of the gospel has begun.

- 8a is even more radical. Here we are not just people in darkness who have been illuminated by Christ. Instead, we are said to have been darkness itself, and now we have become very light “in the Lord.” By virtue of our union with him, we have become what he is, the light of the world.

Light has two effects that Paul develops in the rest of this section.

1. It guides our own walk, and shows us where we should step (8b-10). Image: a flashlight to guide us through the campground at night.
2. It illuminates the faults of unbelievers (11b-13). Image: the bright light in a jeweler’s showcase to permit the careful examination of precious stones.

8b-10, Light produces Righteousness

Three clauses.

What must we do? “Walk as children of light.” Perhaps the Hebrew metaphor is at work here; one characterized by something is a “son” or a “child” of that characteristic. We are light; walk as those characterized by light.

Why should we do this? Because this is the natural outgrowth of the work of the Spirit in us. Here and Gal 5:22 are the only references in the NT to “the fruit of the Spirit.” A minority of mss has “fruit of the light” here, but “Spirit” is the clear majority reading. The two passages complement one another.

- Gal 5:22 tells what that fruit *is*: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control.
- This passage tells what the fruit *is in*; that is, the context in which it is exercised. It is produced in a context of goodness, righteousness, and truth. These terms may be given to help us understand how God’s light manifests itself.
 - “Goodness” expresses our care for one another; cf. Rom. 5:7.
 - “Righteousness” is consistency with the law of God.
 - “Truth” is our integrity with ourselves, the opposite of hypocrisy.

Thus the light should show itself in every aspect of our conduct as it guides our conduct.

How can we do it? “Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.” “Prove” means to review critically; to test; to examine with a view to accepting or rejecting. It is used of approving deacons (1 Tim 3:10), of trying the spirits (1 John 4:1), of God in trying our hearts (1 Thes 2:4). Compare 1 Thes 5:21, “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”

Here, as children of light, we are to review our environment constantly to determine what things are pleasing to the Lord. Our lives are a constant stream of decisions. By walking in the light, we can make those decisions in a way that pleases the Lord.

11b-13, Light brings Reproof

First consider these verses, then a parallel in John's gospel, and then discuss.

The Immediate Text

Just as the first command to separation led to righteousness in our daily choices, the second (11a) leads to reproof of ungodliness. A natural effect of light in the world is to make visible things that were hidden. Now that we are God's light, this becomes our task. Paul develops the idea through three chronological steps in a person's relation with the light.

v.12 describes the effort of the ungodly: to keep their sins secret.

- The antecedent of "them" is "darkness" (v.11, used to refer to people just as in v.8).
- The point of the "shame" here is not that we should be silent about their sins, but that they themselves are ashamed of them and do not speak of them. Except among those most hardened by sin, unbelievers are ashamed of their evil deeds, and try to hide them.

v.13a describes the effect of the light upon such people and their deed. Grammatically, the phrase "that are reproved" is more easily understood as adverbial, "when reproved" (because it is anarthrous, unlike *τα παντα*). They would rather not have them spoken of, because of the shame it would bring, but when the rebuke happens, they are brought out into the open.

v.13b is properly translated as passive; the middle use of the verb is unattested. Thus it should read, "whatever is made manifest, is light." These things, whatever their character, are enlightened, made visible.

Briefly revisit v.14. The purpose and effect of this reproof is that people may become the light of God. We are calling them to awaken and become, like us, light in the Lord. Reproof is unpopular in our culture, a threat to much-cherished "diversity," but it is none the less essential to the process of repentance and faith.

John 3:19-21

There is a close parallel between Paul's teaching here and John 3:19-21. Since they are John's commentary on the Lord's discussion with Nicodemus, and since John's gospel is later than the others, it may be that John is in fact drawing on Paul at this point.

- John 3:20 reflects v.12, the shame that sinners feel over their sin.
- John 3:21 reflects 13b-14, how the manifestation itself can be instrumental in saving unbelievers.

Discussion

How and where does this reproof operate? Observe the preaching of the apostles in Acts, and Rom 1-2.

- To the Gentiles, Acts 14, 17, they proclaim God as the creator who deserves our worship. The sin they hold up is that of idolatry, not lesser ills of fornication and covetousness. Cf. Rom 1. There, the sins of corruption are seen as consequences of the more basic sin, denying God.

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- They call the Jews to account for their violation of the law of Moses. Cf. Rom 2:17ff.
- And in the epistles, to those who call themselves believers, we have the most direct exhortations against ungodliness. Cf. 1 Tim 5:20; Heb 12:5; Rev 3:19.

Recall the focus of 1 Cor. 5. It is futile to rail against the pagans on the issues of common morality. Their problem is that they do not acknowledge their creator, and that is where we must begin with them. Once they have that straight, we can get on to the details.

Yet our emphasis is often in the opposite direction. We want to preach to the gentiles about their individual sins, missing the main fact of their ignorance of God; yet with believers we are strangely silent about moral lapses.

15-21, Two Contrasts

The first focuses on avoiding the distractions of the world and of pseudo-piety, while the second tells us how to spend the time we thus redeem.

15-17, *Not as fools, but as wise*

The construction in v.15 is the same as in 1 Cor 3:10. Not “see that,” but “see, take heed, how.”

- We are to walk circumspectly, with a discerning eye.
- We can conduct this circumspect walk either as fools or as wise. The fool here is not one who fails to walk circumspectly, but one whose circumspection is not done properly. Circumspection can become an end in itself; in this case it becomes all-consuming and does not bring glory to the Lord
- “As wise” is amplified in v.16. Wise circumspection has a distinctive motive and effect.
 - Motive: “The days are evil.” We are surrounded by adversaries; the whole world lies in the evil one. Thus we must keep our eyes open.
 - Effect: “Redeeming the time.” “Time” here has the distinctive sense of “opportunity.” A hallmark of the wickedness around us is that it tempts us to waste our time, and avoiding this waste (not tearing down others, or vaunting our own holiness) is the purpose of wise circumspection. Calvin: “Such corruption having infected the age, the devil appears to have obtained tyrannical sway; so that time cannot be dedicated to God without being in some way redeemed. And what shall be the price of its redemption? To withdraw from the endless variety of allurements which would easily lead us astray; to rid ourselves from the cares and pleasures of the world; and, in a word, to abandon every hinderance. Let us be eager to recover it in every possible way, and let the numerous offenses and arduous toil, which many are in the habit of alleging as an apology for indolence, serve rather to awaken our vigilance. By contrast, circumspection for its own sake is foolish, for it can consume all of our time and leave none for productive work for the Lord.

The “wherefore” in v.17 shows that this short verse is a summary of 15-16. Circumspection is a means to an end. The end is doing the will of the Lord. Thus a wise walk will be one conducted in the knowledge of the will of the Lord.

18-21, Not drunk, but filled

Paul here quotes the first half of Prov 23:31 in LXX (not in MT), which reads, “Be not drunk with wine, but converse (talk) with righteous men, and converse while walking about.” The point of the last exhortation seems to be Deut 6:7, being occupied with the Lord’s commands. These commands were the preeminent possession of the OT believer. In the NT, that pride of place now belongs to the Holy Spirit; cf. 2 Cor 2:6. But the LXX exhortation in Prov. is still appropriate. The believer should be occupied in productive fellowship with the righteous, which Paul here amplifies in the light of the increased prominence of the HS.

18: Debates rage within Christendom over whether wine in itself is sinful. There can be no question that the apostles condemn inebriation.

- Paul does not say, “Do not be excessively drunk with wine,” but “Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess.” Don’t use it for its psychoactive effects at all, not even to relax, because that opens the door to excess.
- In contrast, let your mental well-being and refreshment come from the HS within you.

“Be filled with the Spirit”: lit., “Be being full of.” The NT distinguishes two different ministries of the HS.

- “Filled with” (πιμπλημι) refers to a sudden, temporary, repeatable empowerment for a specific ministry, known in the OT as well as the new: “The Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson...”
- “Full of” (πληροω) refers to maturity, spirituality, and is a distinctive privilege of the NT. This is the verb used in this place. “Let the HS, who lives within you under the terms of the New Covenant, completely occupy and take control of you.” Like the ointment in John 12:3, let its fragrance fill the whole house. Let this, not alcohol, be the source of your joy.

There follow four participial clauses, exhorting us how those who are full of the HS will conduct themselves toward one another. The first two grow directly out of the second half of Prov 23:31 LXX, “converse with righteous men, and converse while walking about.” The last two are suggested in turn by the previous.

19a Speaking to yourselves [to one another] in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.—Two things to note here:

- We are to speak to one another. This theme has been recurrent since ch. 4, in the ministry Paul anticipates of believers toward one another.
- He commends three categories of music as a prime tool for this encouragement:
 - Psalms: Israel’s hymnbook, the Psalter. Too often neglected in modern Christendom, but here directly commended to our attention.
 - Hymns: the term indicates praise to God.
 - Spiritual songs: the most general term, which might include testimony and exhortation.

19b singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.—Godly music is not only a means for our encouragement of one another, but also something to occupy our own hearts as we “walk

about.” How often has one been refreshed by the words of a godly hymn or Psalm in the course of daily work. One reason I like to sing passages of Scripture is that they are then more easily brought to mind for meditation in the course of the day.

20 Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.—The thought of praising God in song leads him to the more general consideration that we ought always to thank God for all things. “God loves us too much to harm us, and is too powerful to make mistakes.” Whatever happens, we should take as his loving gift, and return thanks to him.

21 Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.—In particular, since all is under his control, we ought to behave appropriately in the relations in which he has placed us, “in the fear of God,” obediently to his commands. Amplification of this clause will occupy the next section of the book.

MT is divided between “fear of God” and “fear of Christ.” Both readings were known and discussed in the pre-critical era (e.g., Calvin). Because the latter is unusual, it is probably original, and was corrected to “fear of God.”

Though unusual, the expression is not unprecedented.

- After developing extensively the parallel between the husband/wife relationship and that between Christ and the church, Paul exhorts the wife in 33 to “fear” her husband. This is far clearer if we are to have this attitude toward Christ.
- Cf. Acts 9:31, and recall that “Lord” throughout the NT is an application of the OT title “Jehovah” to our Lord Jesus.
- 2 Cor 5:11 also speaks of “the terror of the Lord.”

The fear of God was the cornerstone of OT wisdom. The wise man is one who understands that God wants people to live in a certain way, that deviation from his will has consequences, and that those consequences are sufficiently unpleasant to motivate us to avoid them. The NT teaches that Jesus the Messiah is the Word who was in the beginning with God, and who was in fact God. So it should not surprise us that he deserves the fear that we appropriately hold toward God. He has given us commandments, and our happiness depends on keeping them.

In particular, here Paul seems to have in mind the commands of the upper room, in which our Lord commanded us to wash one another’s feet (John 13:1-17) and to love one another as he loved us (John 13:34). He, our Lord and our God, came not to be ministered unto, but to minister (Matt 20:28). Thus our fear of him should lead us to follow his example and submit ourselves to one another.

Analysis

The basic argument is that the light in which we now walk (7-8) should enable us to discern the Lord's will (8b-9) from the world's error (11-14). So we ought to watch carefully how we walk, to be on the right side. There follow two contrast: not as fools but as wise (15-17), not as drunk but as filled with the Spirit (18-21).

7 mh\ ou)^n gi/nesqe summe/toxoi au)tw^n:

8 h)^te ga/r pote sko/tos,
nu^n de\ fw^s e)n kuri/w|:

w(s te/kna fwto\s peripatei^te

9 --o(ga/r karpou\s tou^ fwto\s e)n pa/sh| a)gaqwsu/nh| kai\ dikaiosou/nh| kai\ a)lhqei/a|--
10 dokima/zontes ti/ e)stin eu)a/reston tw^| kuri/w|:

11 kai\ mh\ sugkoinwnei^te toi^s e)/rgois toi^s a)ka/rpois tou^ sko/tous,
ma^llon de\ kai\ e)le/gxete,

12 ta\ ga\r krufh^| gino/mena u(p' au)tw^n ai)sxro/n e)stin kai\ le/gein:

13 ta\ de\ pa/nta e)legxo/mena u(po\ tou^ fwto\s fanerou^tai,

14 pa^nn ga\r to\ fanerou/menon fw^s e)stin.

dio\ le/gei,

)/Egeire, o(kaqeu/dwn,

kai\ a)na/sta e)k tw^n nekrw^nn,

kai\ e)pifau/sei soi o(Xristo/s.

15 **Ble/pete ou)^n pw^s a)kribw^s peripatei^te,**

mh\ w(s a)/sofoi

a)ll' w(s sofoi/,

16 e)cagorazo/menoi to\n kairo/n,

o(/ti ai(h(me/rai ponhrai/ ei)sin.

17 dia\ tou^to

mh\ gi/nesqe a)/frones,

a)lla\ suni/ete ti/ to\ qe/lhma tou^ kuri/ou.

18 kai\ mh\ mequ/skesqe oi)/nw|,

e)n w(^| e)stin a)swti/a,

a)lla\ plhrou^sqe e)n pneu/mati,

19 ialou^ntes e(autoi^s [e)n] yalmoi^s kai\ u(/mnois kai\ w)|dai^s pneumatikai^s,

a)/dontes kai\ ya/llontes th^| kardi/a| u(mw^nn tw^| kuri/w|,

20 eu)xaristou^ntes pa/ntote u(pe\r pa/ntwn e)n o)no/mati tou^ kuri/ou h(mw^nn)Ihsou^

Xristou^ tw^| qew^| kai\ patri/,

21 u(potasso/menoi a)llh/lois e)n fo/bw| Xristou^.