





Sunday School Lesson
Eph. 5:6-21
 by Lorin L. Cranford
 All rights reserved ©
Living in the Light



A copy of this lesson is posted in Adobe pdf format at <http://cranfordville.com> under Bible Studies in the Bible Study Aids section. A note about the [blue, underlined](#) material: These are hyperlinks that allow you to click them on and bring up the specified scripture passage automatically while working inside the pdf file connected to the internet. Just use your web browser's back arrow or the taskbar to return to the lesson material.

Quick Links to the Study

I. [Context](#)

- a. [Historical](#)
- b. [Literary](#)

II. [Message](#)

- a. [Don't be deceived, vv. 6-14](#)
- b. [Be careful how you walk, vv. 15-21](#)

With this lesson, the Smyth and Helwys Formations Sunday School lesson series begins a four lesson unit under the heading "Life in the Light." The focus is upon the biblical metaphor of light and darkness. Some introductory attention to the role of this imagery is necessary to form a more accurate understanding of how this is used in scripture.

The idea of light is frequent in the Bible showing up some 261 times in the [New Revised Standard Version](#). [Several different](#) Greek words can be translated by the English word "light" but the main word group is built off the Greek noun φῶς, φωτός, τό ([phos](#), photos; "light", 72x) and verb φωτίζω ([photidzo](#); "enlighten", 11x). Michael J. Wilkins ("Light," [Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology](#), online) has a helpful summation of the use of the term in the Bible.

Light always involves the removal of darkness in the unfolding of biblical history and theology. The contrast of light and darkness is common to all of the words for "light" in both Old and New Testaments (esp. Heb. or [אור]; Gk. phos [f'w]). The literal contrast between metaphysical good and evil, God and evil forces, believers and unbelievers. The Bible entertains no thought that darkness is equal in power to God's light. God is the absolute Sovereign who rules over the darkness and the powers of evil.

Light Is Good. The importance of light and darkness is dramatically presented in the opening sentences of the biblical record. In response to the darkness that was over the surface of the deep (Gen 1:2), God spoke and light came into being. Darkness and light are evocative words in Hebrew. Darkness evokes everything that is anti-God: the wicked (Prov 2:13), judgment (Exod 10:21), death (Psalm 88:12). Light is the first of the Creator's works, manifesting the divine operation in a world that is darkness and chaos without it. While light is not itself divine, it is often used metaphorically for life (Psalm 56:13), salvation (Isa 9:2), the commandments (Prov 6:23), and the divine presence of God (Exod 10:23). In the first creative act, "God saw that the light was good" (Gen 1:3).

God Is Light. If light represents goodness in antithesis to the evil associated with darkness, it is a natural step for the biblical authors to understand God, the ultimate good, as light. Light symbolizes the holy God. Light signifies God's presence and favor (Psalm 27:1; Isa 9:2; 2 Cor 4:6) in contrast to God's judgment (Amos 5:18). Throughout the Old Testament light is regularly associated with God and his word, with salvation, with goodness, with truth, with life. The New Testament resonates with these themes, so that the holiness of God is presented in such a way that it is said that God "lives in unapproachable light" (1 Tim 6:16). God is light (1 John 1:5) and the Father of lights (James 1:17) who dispels darkness.

The Johannine writings gather up the Old Testament understanding of light and show its summation in Jesus Christ (thirty-three of the seventy-two occurrences of phos [f'w'] in the New Testament are found in the Johannine literature). Light is the revelation of God's love in Jesus Christ and the penetration of that love into lives darkened by sin (1 John 1:5-7). Jesus declares that he is "the light of the world" (John 8:12; 9:5). Jesus is the incarnate Word of God, who has come as the light that enlightens all people (John 1:4-14), so that those believing in him will no longer be in darkness (12:46).

Paul concurs as he harks back to the creation account: "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness, make his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ' (2 Cor 4:6). Through the Word of God light came into existence (Gen 1:1-3), and through the revelation of God in Jesus Christ the Word brought light to humanity.

The Light of Salvation and Life for Believers. Those responding to the light are ushered into the sphere of life in which darkness is dispelled. Salvation brings light to those in darkness (Job 22:28; Psalm 27:1; Isa 9:2; Matt 4:15-16). Jesus Christ is life-giving light, in whom is life (John 1:4), and those who follow him "will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). Believers are "sons of light" (John 12:36; Eph 5:8; 1 Thess 5:5).

Light possesses powers essential to true life. Hence "to be in the light" means simply "to live" — both life eternal and life temporal. The one who has come into the light of Jesus Christ is brought into the ethical life characterized by light (cf. Luke 16:8; John 3:19-21; 12:36; 2 Cor 6:14; Col 1:12-14; 1 Thess 5:5; 1 Peter 2:9). The godly person enjoys the light of life in the present age (1 Jo 2:10). Paul intentionally contrasts the old life in darkness with new life in the light in Christ Jesus (Eph 4:17-24). Although Satan can disguise himself as "an angel of light," Christians live in the true light of salvation, laying aside the deeds of darkness and putting on the protective "armor of light" (Rom 13:12). The revealed will of God provides light to the heart, soul, and mind of humanity, providing guidance in a dark world (Psalm 19:7-10; 119:105, 130). A stark contrast will characterize the old life and the new: "For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light — for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true" (Eph 5:8-9). The truly Christian life is a life of light.

A Light to the World. God is light, who dispels the darkness of this world. Jesus came as the light of the world, breaking through the darkness of sin by his work on the cross. It follows that believers are a light to the world as well. Jesus describes his disciples as light and light-bearers (Matt 5:14-16). Paul indicates to believers in Asia Minor and Macedonia that their lives are a shining light of witness to the world around them (Eph 5:8; Php 2:15). It is the task of all believers to pass on the divine light they have received. What they have received in the secret intimacy of the community of believers they are to proclaim fearlessly "in the light" of public (Matt 10:27; Luke 12:3). All those who have entered into the light now bear responsibility as missionaries of Christ, shining out as "lights in a dark world" with the light of God himself (Php 2:15).

The Light Yet to Come. While both the Old Testament and New Testament describe the future of the ungodly in terms of eschatological darkness, symbolizing perdition, they equally describe the future glory for believers in terms of light. In the New Jerusalem there will be no more night (Rev 22:5), and the city will not need the sun, moon, or created light to shine on it, "for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light" (Rev 21:23-24). The prophetic word of God is what brings hope of the light yet to come, and Peter provides an appropriate admonition: "You will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts" (2 Peter 1:19). At the future appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ all darkness will be dispelled, and believers will walk in purity, peace, and joy in the light of the living God.

In [an earlier lesson](#), "Taking Care of Time," we examined these verses as a part of a study including also Eccles. 3:1-15. Some relevant parts of that study will be incorporated into this study.

I. Context

a. Historical

Paul's letter to the Ephesians stands traditionally as one of the letters written by the apostle during a time of imprisonment, thus it is one of the [Prison Letters](#). These letters include Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon. The [last three letters](#) are closely related to one another via contents and references to individuals, and thus were probably written in a close proximity to one another. The place of writing -- and thus the time etc. -- vary between the early 60s when Paul was under house arrest in Rome (cf. [Acts 28:30-31](#), NRSV, "30 He lived there two whole years at his own expense and welcomed all who came to him, 31 proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.") or the late 50s when Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea Philippi awaiting the outcome of his trial before the Roman governors Felix and Festus (cf. Acts 24:27, NRSV, "After two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus; and since he wanted to grant the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison."). For more details, see the earlier [Bible study on Ephesians 2:1-10](#) at Cranfordville.com under Bible Studies: New Testament.

b. Literary

Eph. 5:6-21 stand as [paraenetical material](#) in its literary genre. These verses contain admonitions to a certain pattern of behavior predicated on being saved and committed to Jesus. Contextually, this material is a part of the [Body](#) proper of the letter (2:1-6:22), which develops religious belief expressions largely in the beginning part and then moves mostly toward moral admonition in the later segment. In a

manner typical in the Pauline letters, belief and behavior are closely linked together. The right kind of behavior grows out of correct belief, and when false belief is present wrong behavior is one of the consequences.

II. Message

In the Greek text, Eph. 5:6-21 hangs together as a cohesive expression of thought, and subdivides itself into verses 6-14 and verses 15-21.

One quick note about verse 21. Many recent translations attach it to the following verses dealing with husband wife relations (vv. 22-33). While the participle phrase in the Greek text helps set the tone for these verses, in reality it stands as the fifth qualifying participle phrase modifying the admonition, "Be filled with the Spirit" in 5:18. In the internet version of this lesson, see the [Greek text diagram](#) for details. Being submissive to one another inside the community of faith is one of the identifying traits of the fullness of the presence of God's Spirit in us. That same trait then establishes the foundation for husband/wife relationships inside a Christian family.

a. Don't be deceived, vv. 6-14

Greek NT

<5:6> Μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς ἀπατάτω κενοῖς λόγοις· διὰ ταῦτα γὰρ ἔρχεται ἡ ὀργὴ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπὶ τοὺς υἱοὺς τῆς ἀπειθείας. <5:7> μὴ οὖν γίνεσθε συμμετοχοὶ αὐτῶν· <5:8> ἦτε γὰρ ποτε σκότος, νῦν δὲ φῶς ἐν κυρίῳ· ὡς τέκνα φωτὸς περιπατεῖτε <5:9> - ὁ γὰρ καρπὸς τοῦ φωτὸς ἐν πάσῃ ἀγαθῶσυνῃ καὶ δικαιοσύνῃ καὶ ἀληθείᾳ - <5:10> δοκιμάζοντες τί ἐστὶν εὐάρεστον τῷ κυρίῳ <5:11> καὶ μὴ συγκοινωνεῖτε τοῖς ἔργοις τοῖς ἀκάριοις τοῦ σκότους, μᾶλλον δὲ καὶ ἐλέγχετε. <5:12> τὰ γὰρ κρυφῆ γινόμενα ὑπ' αὐτῶν αἰσχρὸν ἐστὶν καὶ λέγειν, <5:13> τὰ δὲ πάντα ἐλεγχόμενα ὑπὸ τοῦ φωτὸς φανεροῦνται, <5:14> πᾶν γὰρ τὸ φανερούμενον φῶς ἐστὶν. διὸ λέγει, Ἔγειρε, ὁ καθεύδων, καὶ ἀνάστα ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν, καὶ ἐπιφάσει σοὶ ὁ Χριστός.

NASB

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 be partakers with them; 8 for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light 9 (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), 10 trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; 12 for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. 13 But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. 14 For this reason it says, "Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you."

NRSV

6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes on those who are disobedient. 7 Therefore do not be associated with them. 8 For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light— 9 for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. 10 Try to find out 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 mention what such people do secretly; 13 but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, 14 for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

NLT

6 Don't be fooled by those who try to excuse these sins, for the terrible anger of God comes upon all those who disobey him. 7 Don't participate in the things these people do. 8 For though your hearts were once full of darkness, now you are full of light from the Lord, and your behavior should show it! 9 For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true. 10 Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no part in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness; instead, rebuke and expose them. 12 It is shameful even to talk about the things that ungodly people do in secret. 13 But when the light shines on them, it becomes clear how evil these things are. 14 And where your light shines, it will expose their evil deeds. This is why it is said, "Awake, O sleeper, rise up from the dead, and Christ will give you light."

Notes:

This first section focuses on not being led astray by false teachers. In the larger context of chapter five, which struggles largely with the question of how a Christian ought to live in the world, these verses (5:6-14) admonish the believing community to avoid getting trapped by folks teaching that moral purity is no longer important in the Christian life. Ralph Martin in the *Interpretation Commentary* (iPreach) has a helpful summation of these verses:

Yet another title is “children of light” (vv. 8-14). This title is interesting not only for its association with the community of the Dead Sea scrolls who also used this description to set off their group from the surrounding “children of darkness” but for the example in verse 14 of a baptismal reminder. At the commencement of their new life as believers these men and women had been brought into the full light of Christ. We may overhear the very terms of their initiation in a three-line baptismal chant contained in verse 14:

Awake, o sleeper,
And get up from among the dead;
And Christ’s light will shine on you!

The life situation of this snatch of early hymnody is evidently baptism, which was frequently known in the church as a person’s “enlightenment” and depicted as the rising of the new convert from the death of sin into union with the living Lord (Heb. 6:4; Rom. 6:4-12). The writer harks back to this experience as a reminder to his readers that they should now make good their baptismal profession by walking in Christ’s light and stirring themselves to active witness. Romans 13:11-14 makes the same point.

Frequently, these verses are linked to an emerging form of religious belief at the close of the first Christian century known as Gnosticism, which began making inroads into Christianity during the second half of the first century. Often -- at least in the more fully developed ‘Christian’ versions at the beginning of the second century -- this kind of thinking set forth the idea that since saved the Christian’s soul was perfect and untouchable by sin, then the individual Christian had no need to pay any attention to living a disciplined life morally. If such a strand of teaching was beginning to make inroads into the Christian community at Ephesus, then Paul’s strong admonition to them should be taken as a warning about the seriousness of sinful conduct in the eyes of God and that believers should have nothing to do with individuals teaching such ideas.

The very straightforward flow of thought in vv. 6-14 is reflected in the [Block Diagram](#) of this text in the Internet version of the lesson. The apostle begins with an admonition to his readers to avoid being deceived by empty words (v. 6a; NRSV): “Let no one deceive you with empty words.” The key here is the meaning of “empty words” (κενοῖς λόγοις). In the larger context of both this passage (vv. 6-14) and 4:25-5:5, it becomes clear that what is in mind has to do with how a Christian behaves him/herself. In the moral admonitions (paraenesis) of 4:25-5:5 the apostle has argued against living in a very sinful manner while claiming to be a Christian:

4:25 So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. 26 Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and do not make room for the devil. 28 Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. 29 Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. 31 Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, 32 and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. 5:1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, 2 and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. 3 But fornication and impurity of any kind, or greed, must not even be mentioned among you, as is proper among saints. 4 Entirely out of place is obscene, silly, and vulgar talk; but instead, let there be thanksgiving. 5 Be sure of this, that no fornicator or impure person, or one who is greedy (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

The “empty words” then become those which would deny the correctness of what has just been said about the obligations of a Christian to live by certain standards of behavior. The nature of the admonition in 5:6a suggests that some individuals in the churches this letter was addressed to were doing exactly that. For most Christians today this kind of teaching about Christian living seems so far fetched as to be impossible to have ever existed. But in the first century Greco-Roman world where religion and morality were virtually never connected to one another, one can easily see how new Christians, growing up with such

viewpoints, could have difficulty seeing how religious commitment to Christ should make any substantial difference in the way they behaved themselves on a day-to-day basis.

The basis for the admonition against being deceived is given in v. 6b (NRSV): “for because of these things the wrath of God comes on those who are disobedient” (διὰ ταῦτα γὰρ ἔρχεται ἡ ὀργὴ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπὶ τοὺς υἱοὺς τῆς ἀπειθείας). The “sons of disobedience” has a Jewish echo to it, and probably reflects the perspective claimed by PHEME PERKINS (“Ephesians,” *New Interpreter’s Bible*, iPreach): “The image of the wicked as persons who justify their actions by claiming that God does not judge was common in Jewish writing (see Exod 5:9 LXX; Deut 32:47; Wisdom 2; T. Naph. 3.1).” The point made is that God’s wrath does come down on people who live sinfully.

The implication of this is then drawn out in v. 7 (NRSV): “Therefore do not be **associated** with them” (μὴ οὖν γίνεσθε **συμμέτοχοι** αὐτῶν). The demand to disassociate oneself from such people is made upon the Ephesian readers. Earlier Paul had asserted that through Christ, “the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and **sharers** in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (NRSV; εἶναι τὰ ἔθνη συγκληρονόμα καὶ σύσσωμα καὶ **συμμέτοχα** τῆς ἐπαγγελίας ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου.). What does being a *συμμέτοχος* (*summetochos*) suggest?

In the world of Paul and Jesus, the Jewish group known as the [Essenes](#) had looked at the current religious practices of most Jews, especially those who were religious leaders, and concluded that these practices were rotten to the core. Thus, the Essenes in various groups called for true Jews to separate themselves from society and adopt a monastic, communal way of living where they could more easily concentrate on principle of holy living without the temptation that came from being around religious and moral perversion.

Is Paul here calling for Christians to follow the pattern of the Essenes of his day? It’s very doubtful, since no instructions on how to live and to organize such a community are contained in Ephesians. The separation called for here is a distancing of one’s self from the life-style of the wicked, rather than a societal separation. His amplification in vv. 7b-14 make that very clear.

He begins a defense of his call for separation with a reminder of their BC/AD life experience in v. 8a (NRSV): “For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light” (ἦτε γὰρ ποτε σκότος, νῦν δὲ φῶς ἐν κυρίῳ). Prior to their conversion, these people were living in spiritual darkness, but with the coming of Christ into their lives they now were living in spiritual enlightenment. The moral implications of that darkness have already been spelled out earlier in 4:17-24 (NRSV), especially vv. 17-19:

17 Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart. 19 They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. 20 That is not the way you learned Christ! 21 For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus. 22 You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

But with Christ in their lives they are now living in spiritual enlightenment. That is, they have come to a new and better understanding of how life is supposed to work, especially religiously. Verses 22-24 of chapter four (above) already laid the foundation for 5:8b-14 that will make demands upon the readers to implement this new understanding by changing their life-style.

Verse 9 stands as a parenthetical insertion interrupting the thought flow of the sentence in vv. 8b-14a. Who the Ephesians are now spiritually -- “children of light” -- becomes the basis of three core admonitions: “Walk” (v. 8b), “do not participate” (v. 11a) and “expose” (v. 11b).

First the readers are to “walk as children of Light..., trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord” (v.8b, 10; NASB; ὡς τέκνα φωτὸς περιπατεῖτε...·5:10· δοκιμάζοντες τί ἐστὶν εὐάρεστον τῷ κυρίῳ). The image of “walk” (περιπατεῖτε) is mainly the idea of “behaving oneself.” As Christians approach a distinctive life-style of behavior, it is done as we “test out (δοκιμάζοντες) what is pleasing to the Lord.” PHEME PERKINS (*New Interpreter’s Bible*, iPreach) has some helpful observations:

They are to “try to find out” (δοκιμάζω *dokimazo*, “discern” or “test”) what is pleasing to the Lord (v. 10). This expression implies that believers must determine what is suitable behavior in concrete circumstances. For the philosopher, such moral discernment is the activity of reason.²⁸⁶ Earlier, Ephesians spoke of the renewal of mind

that comes with conversion (4:23). Romans 12:2 treats that renewal as the basis of the ability to discern God's will. Elsewhere Paul also uses the verb dokimazo in the sense of taking responsibility before the Lord, who is to come in judgment (Phil 1:10-11). Failure to "discern" what is required will lead to divine punishment (1 Cor 11:28-32).

Implicit in these words is an approach to Christian living that seriously attempts to understand God's leading in every aspect of living day to day. Through both scripture study and prayer we gain greater insights about God's will, but then through the renewing presence and leadership of God's Holy Spirit we find insights into how to apply our spiritual understanding to the daily circumstances of living.

As we approach spiritual living this way, one thing to remember is "for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true" (5:9; NRSV; ὁ γὰρ καρπὸς τοῦ φωτὸς ἐν πάσῃ ἀγαθωσύνη καὶ δικαιοσύνη καὶ ἀληθείᾳ). Verse 9 provides a spiritual ruler to measure the correctness of our insights that help guide us through life.

Just as vv. 8b-10 have focused on the believer's stance toward the light, verses 11-14a will focus on the proper stance toward darkness. A double admonition (-/+) in verse 11 characterizes that stance: **don't participate** (μὴ συγκοινωνεῖτε)...**rather expose** (μᾶλλον δὲ ἐλέγχετε). What is this in regard to? "In the unfruitful works of darkness" (NRSV; τοῖς ἀκάρποις τοῦ σκοτοῦς). The first admonition is relatively easy to understand. We are not to participate in evil works. The second admonition is a little more challenging. Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld ("Ephesians," *Believer's Church Bible Commentary*, iPreach) has a helpful summation:

One might expect the community of believers now to turn their back on the darkness and to separate itself, as happened at Qumran and countless times since. Radical nonconformity is often buttressed with hostility toward those who do not meet the standards of righteousness and truth. Ephesians, however, proposes something better for believers than turning their backs on the darkness and those who sit in it and pushing the works of darkness out of mind (5:12). Instead, the children of light are to expose (elenchō) evil works (so NIV and NRSV; bring them out to the light, GNB; show them up for what they are, NJB, REB; condemn them, NAB).

As the various translations show, the Greek word elenchō has a range of meaning (Büchsel, 1964). "To condemn" (NAB) clearly fits a community taking a hard and absolute line against the works of darkness (as in Wisd. of Sol. 4:20). This passage leaves no doubt that actions, words, and dispositions that grow out of darkness are to be condemned (note esp. 5:5-6).

Elenchō has a rich association with several texts already discussed in relation to 4:25 (notes; "Anger and Speaking Truth," TBC for 4:17-5:2). In Leviticus 19:17-18, to "reprove" (NRSV; elenchō in LXX) is an expression of covenant obligation to love the neighbor. In Matthew 18:15, Jesus calls on his followers to expose (elenchō) the sin of the brother and sister—a generous if often conflictual act of love meant to bring repentance and restoration (cf. 1 Cor. 14:24-25).

Ephesians 5:13-14 suggests that such an understanding of elenchō is present also in this passage. However, the focus of the exposure is not on the misdeeds of fellow members of the community (Best, 1998:492-3; cf. Lincoln: 329-30), but on the goings on among the sons of disobedience (Schnackenburg: 226, n. 34). Now the act of neighborly love seen in 4:25 is to be extended to the sons of disobedience, whether or not they heed the confrontation or consider it an act of love (on "evangelistic exposing," see 1 Cor. 14:24-25; John 4:29). Preaching peace to the far (2:13, 17) now finds expression in relation to the confrontation with a culture of darkness.

In other words we Christians are to take public stands against evil in our world.

The reason for this is given in 5:12-14a: "For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; 13 but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, 14 for everything that becomes visible is light" (NRSV; τὰ γὰρ κρυφῆ γινόμενα ὑπ' αὐτῶν αἰσχρὸν ἐστὶν καὶ λέγειν, <5:13> τὰ δὲ πάντα ἐλεγχόμενα ὑπὸ τοῦ φωτὸς φανεροῦνται, <5:14> πᾶν γὰρ τὸ φανερούμενον φῶς ἐστὶν). Yoder's comments here are also helpful:

Verse 13 expresses a proverb: *All things that are exposed by the light become visible (or are revealed, or made visible by the light)*. The grammar is ambiguous, but the meaning is clear: *the light* shows up things for what they truly are (so also NJB, REB). Up to this point, the meaning could still be chiefly condemnatory. But verse 14 adds a further maxim: *Everything that is revealed is light*. NIV's translation, *for it is light that makes everything visible*, does not capture the surprising twist. In this instance, exposing the works of darkness is not primarily directed at the works of darkness still present among fellow Christians (as in 4:25). Here it is participation in God's comprehensive project of reclaiming creation and those who inhabit it, including the *sons of disobedience* who sit in *darkness* (cf. 1:10; 2:4; Perkins: 119). To expose is to transform.

Thus our mission in exposing darkness is to transform it into light. The redemptive motivation is to drive

our strong stands against evil -- something that we Christians need to work on in today's world!

The last element in 5:14b sounds like a scripture quote, since the introductory formula is similar to such: "Wherefore it says..." (διὸ λέγει...). But what follows isn't a quote from OT scripture. Instead, it most likely came from an early Christian hymn sang at baptism. This is the consensus of the majority of NT scholars today. It's widespread use gave it a level of importance so that Paul could appeal to it the same way he typically did to OT scripture.

Once more John Yoder's explanation is quite helpful:

This explains the otherwise baffling presence in verse 14 of a hymn fragment (Best, 1998:497–8; Lincoln: 331), likely at home in the baptismal celebration of coming to life with Christ (cf. Rom. 6:1–11; Eph. 2:4–6; Schnackenburg: 228–30). This "three-line baptismal chant" (R. Martin, 1991:63) must have enjoyed wide currency in Pauline circles and have achieved something approaching canonical status. This status is shown by the fact that it is introduced with a formula otherwise reserved for quoting Scripture (cf. 4:8; James 4:6).

Therefore it says:

Arise, sleeper,
and rise from the dead,
and the Christ will shine on you! (5:14)

This hymn or chant contains a number of important items. First, since it typically would have been sung by those attending the baptism of new believers, it in effect becomes an evangelistic wake-up call, echoing Christ's preaching of peace to the far and the near in 2:13, 17. It also reminds believers that they are themselves the beneficiaries of Christ's gracious and transforming illumination. With this disposition of gratitude, they are to direct the light into the darkness.

Although the hymn celebrates Christ as the one who shines on the sleeping dead, Jewish readers will surely have heard echoes of the great blessing in Numbers 6:24–26 and, more specifically, of Isaiah 60:1–4. In that instance, the faithful are summoned to arise and shine, reflecting the glory of the Lord. Moreover, the peoples who sit in darkness shall be drawn to this great light emanating from the people of God. In Ephesians, "Christ" includes those who have become part of Christ's body. Not surprisingly, those who were once drawn to the light of Christ have themselves become identified as light (5:8). They are light in the Lord. As such, they participate as members of Christ's body, as members of the new human, in shining the light into the eyes of those sleeping in the darkness (cf. Mt. 5:14, 16; earlier, Is. 42:6–7).

Thus our mission is to shine in this darkened world. May our prayer be that of old hymn:

Light of the world,
Illumine this darkened earth of Thine,
Till everything that's human be filled with light divine;
Till every tongue and nation from sin's dominion free
Rise in the new creation,
Which springs from love and Thee.

As Christ's body in this world, we are the instruments of that shining.

b. Be careful how you walk, vv. 15-21

Greek NT

<5:15> Βλέπετε οὖν ἀκριβῶς πῶς περιπατεῖτε μὴ ὡς ἄσοφοι ἀλλ' ὡς σοφοί, <5:16> ἐξαγοραζόμενοι τὸν καιρὸν, ὅτι αἱ ἡμέραι πονηραὶ εἰσιν. <5:17> διὰ τοῦτο μὴ γίνεσθε ἄφρονες, ἀλλὰ συνιετε τί τὸ θέλημα τοῦ κυρίου. <5:18> καὶ μὴ

NASB

15 Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, 16 making the most of your time, because the days are evil. 17 So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, 19

NRSV

15 Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, 16 making the most of the time, because the days are evil. 17 So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, 19 as you

NLT

15 So be careful how you live, not as fools but as those who are wise. 16 Make the most of every opportunity for doing good in these evil days. 17 Don't act thoughtlessly, but try to understand what the Lord wants you to do. 18 Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your

μεθύσκεσθε οἴνω, ἐν ᾧ
 <5:19> λαλοῦντες
 ἑαυτοῖς [ἐν] ψαλμοῖς
 καὶ ὕμνοις καὶ ᾠδαῖς
 πνευματικαῖς, ᾄδοντες
 καὶ ψάλλοντες τῇ
 καρδίᾳ ὑμῶν τῷ κυρίῳ,
 <5:20> εὐχαριστοῦντες
 πάντοτε ὑπὲρ πάντων ἐν
 ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου
 ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τῷ
 θεῷ καὶ πατρί, <5:21>
 ὑποτασσόμενοι
 ἀλλήλοις ἐν φόβῳ
 Χριστοῦ.

speaking to one another
 in psalms and hymns
 and spiritual songs, sing-
 ing and making melody
 with your heart to the
 Lord; 20 always giving
 thanks for all things in the
 name of our Lord Jesus
 Christ to God, even the
 Father; 21 and be sub-
 ject to one another in the
 fear of Christ.

sing psalms and hymns
 and spiritual songs
 among yourselves, sing-
 ing and making melody to
 the Lord in your hearts,
 20 giving thanks to God
 the Father at all times and
 for everything in the
 name of our Lord Jesus
 Christ. 21 Be subject to
 one another out of rever-
 ence for Christ.

life. Instead, let the Holy
 Spirit fill and control you.
 19 Then you will sing
 psalms and hymns and
 spiritual songs among
 yourselves, making mu-
 sic to the Lord in your
 hearts. 20 And you will
 always give thanks for
 everything to God the
 Father in the name of our
 Lord Jesus Christ. 21
 And further, you will sub-
 mit to one another out of
 reverence for Christ.

Notes:

In these verses, 5:15-21, the emphasis focuses on living in the wisdom that the light of salvation has provided. The conceptual foundation for this kind of thinking is the ancient Jewish wisdom tradition, as Ralph L. Martin (*Interpretation Commentary*) notes:

The appeal to wisdom in 5:15-18 marks out this section as indebted (if indirectly) to the sapiential tradition of the Old Testament. Israel's sages in Proverbs and Sirach sought to guide their contemporaries by recourse to a way of life patterned on wisdom, that is, obedience to God's law and loyalty to his cause in everyday circumstances. Terms like "wise," "foolish," and maybe "filled with the Spirit" indicate how this wisdom instruction may have entered Christian moral theology at an early stage. The point is that believers are cautioned not to wander aimlessly through life's maze or become victims of a moral stupor (hence v. 18a: "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery," leading to stupefaction). Rather, wisdom's call is to leave "dame Folly" (as in Prov. 5—7) and to follow the path of sobriety and seriousness, based on a conscious effort to ascertain the divine mind and to employ one's opportunities to best advantage (v. 16). The prudential element in this ethical admonition should not be overlooked or despised. People today need to have some ethical advice clearly spelled out for them and set down in manageable and easily understood terms.

In the underlying Greek text these verses are made up of three sentences: vv. 15-16; v. 17; vv. 18-21. These form three admonitions for this section: (1) be careful how you live; (2) become smart, not dumb; (3) don't be drunk but be filled with the Spirit.

First, we should be careful how we walk (vv. 15-16). The stress is upon being spiritually perceptive people. "How we walk" is a word picture for "how we live" as is reflected in the NRSV and NLT translations. Careful living incorporates two fundamental things in this admonition: (a) spiritual insight and (b) wise use of opportune moments. The reason for this is given as "because the days are evil." We live in a time of evil influence. Therefore, we must ἐξαγοραζόμενοι τὸν καιρὸν which is translated correctly as "making the most of the time" (NRSV), and even better as "Make the most of every opportunity for doing good" (NLT).

Second, we should not turn into morons but become wise people as we live life (v. 17). The above admonition becomes the launch pad for this second one (διὰ τοῦτο). At the heart of this is determining the will of God for our living. That is, deciding how God wants us to live. As Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, "Ephesians," *Believer's Church Bible Commentary* (iPreach), suggests,

"To be wise is to know the will of the Lord (5:17). Here Lord is not restricted to Christ (contra Best, 1998:506; Lincoln: 343), even if it includes Christ. The phrase has both a large and a specific meaning. On one hand, it refers to knowing the height, depth, width, and length of the mystery of the will of God as revealed in Christ, which is to gather up all things in Christ (cf. 1:9–10; cf. 3:18–21). This entails an appreciation for God's gracious intentions for the disobedient (2:1–10), specifically for Gentiles (2:11–22; chap. 3). It also means understanding what kind of behavior God expects from the community that constitutes God's home. It means imitating God and Christ (4:32–5:2). It means learning Christ and the truth in Jesus (4:20–21). All this can be summarized as discerning what gives God pleasure (cf. 5:10).

Thirdly, we are to be filled with the Holy Spirit (vv. 18-21). Rather than drunken immoral behavior, Christians should have the presence and leadership of God's Spirit in their lives. The central affirmation of this comes through worship as is reflected in the five qualifying participle phrases of the basic affirmation: (1) speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, (2) singing and (3) making melody with your heart to the Lord; (4) always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and (5) being subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

Ralph Martin (*Interpretation Commentary*) provides helpful insight on the musical aspects of verses 19-20:

The cameo of 5:19-20 is again of interest in allowing us to take a peep at the early churches in their worship practices. Hymnic praise has always conveyed the note of thanksgiving to God, which is par excellence the noblest use of the human voice (v. 4). When Augustine defined a hymn as "a song of praise to God" he had primarily in view certain of the Old Testament psalms and Christian compositions that celebrated God's creating and redeeming purposes in Christ. The latter creations, for example, the Te Deum, which tradition ascribes to Augustine's period, go back to New Testament precedents in Revelation 4—5 and to such memorable examples as Phil. 2:6-11; Col. 1:15-20; and John 1:1-18, all three notable hymns to Christ that announce his cosmic role and salvific mission in bringing heaven and earth together. They are essentially hymns devoted to the theme of reconciliation. "Spiritual songs" has the more general term, "odes," to suggest a range of Spirit-inspired pieces that operate on the horizontal plane as exhortations to one's fellow believers to spur them on in the journey of life. Hence the verb in verse 19 is "addressing one another." Augustine's definition is seen now to be too constricting. Our use of "words sung to music" in modern worship should make room for this third type of public utterance and give our fellow worshipers a chance to express their deep-felt feelings in a way somewhat more relevant to our hopes, fears, and struggles than traditional hymns perhaps allow. This is a much canvassed area of debate, and we are all self-appointed experts in the field of liturgical and corporate praise. "The best hymns are the ones I like" expresses an apparently irrefutable opinion, and wise pastors will make certain allowances to take in a wide variety of taste and religious experience.

Most of all, the presence of the Holy Spirit is evidenced by our attitudes toward one another (v. 21). The appropriate posture is that of servanthood, just as Jesus characterized his own ministry, "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" ([Mk. 10:45](#), NRSV).

Thus, the idea of "living in the light" is a rich, deeply profound image about how the Christian is to live life on a day-to-day basis. In Eph. 5:6-21 the focus is on how we approach the darkened world around us in order to avoid being trapped by it. As well as to reach out to it redemptively. And also we are to concentrate on the wonderful blessings gained from our conversion from darkness into light and the impact that should make on our daily living.

Diagram of Eph: 5:6-21

1 ⁶ Μηδείς ὑμᾶς ἀπατάτω
κενοῖς λόγοις·
γάρ
διὰ ταῦτα
2 ἔρχεται ἡ ὀργὴ τοῦ θεοῦ
ἐπὶ τοὺς υἱοὺς τῆς ἀπειθείας.
7 οὖν
3 μὴ γίνεσθε συμμέτοχοι
αὐτῶν·
8 γάρ
4 ἦτε ποτε σκότος,
δὲ
5 (ἐστὲ) νῦν φῶς
ἐν κυρίῳ·
ὡς τέκνα φωτὸς
6 περιπατεῖτε
9 γάρ
7 ὁ καρπὸς τοῦ φωτὸς (ἐστίν)
ἐν πάσῃ ἀγαθωσύνῃ
καὶ
δικαιοσύνῃ
καὶ
ἀληθείᾳ
10 δοκιμάζοντες
τί ἐστίν εὐάρεστον
τῷ κυρίῳ
11 καὶ
8 μὴ συγκοινωνεῖτε
τοῖς ἔργοις τοῖς ἀκαρποῖς τοῦ σκότους,
δὲ
μᾶλλον
καὶ
9 ἐλέγχετε.
12 γάρ
10 τὰ κρυφῆ γινόμενα
ὑπὸ αὐτῶν
αἰσχρὸν ἐστίν
καὶ
λέγειν,
13 δὲ
11 τὰ πάντα ἐλεγχόμενα
ὑπὸ τοῦ φωτὸς
φανερῶνται,
14 γάρ
12 πᾶν τὸ φανερούμενον φῶς ἐστίν.

διὸ
13 λέγει,
α Ἔγειρε,
ὁ καθεύδων,
καὶ
β ἀνάστα
ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν,
καὶ
γ ἐπιφάσει σοι ὁ Χριστός.

15 οὖν
14 Βλέπετε
ἀκριβῶς
πῶς περιπατεῖτε
μὴ ὡς ἄσοφοι
ἀλλ' ὡς σοφοί,
16 ἐξαγοραζόμενοι τὸν καιρὸν,
ὅτι αἱ ἡμέραι πονηραὶ εἰσιν.

17 διὰ τοῦτο
15 μὴ γίνεσθε ἄφρονες,
ἀλλὰ
16 συνίετε
τί τὸ θέλημα τοῦ κυρίου.

18 καὶ
17 μὴ μεθύσκεσθε
οἴνω,
ἐν ᾧ ἐστὶν ἄσωτία,
ἀλλὰ
18 πληροῦσθε
ἐν πνεύματι,
19 λαλοῦντες ἑαυτοῖς
ἐν ψαλμοῖς
καὶ
ὑμνοῖς
καὶ
ὧδαῖς πνευματικαῖς,
ᾄδοντες
καὶ
ψάλλοντες
τῇ καρδίᾳ ὑμῶν
τῷ κυρίῳ,
20 εὐχαριστοῦντες... τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ,
πάντοτε
ὑπὲρ πάντων
ἐν ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ
21 ὑποτασσόμενοι ἀλλήλοις
ἐν φόβῳ Χριστοῦ.