

Series: Ephesians
Title: Reprove with Light
Text: Ephesians 4: 11-20
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Ephesians 5: 11: And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. 12: For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. 13: But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light. 14: Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. 15: See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, 16: Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

This word is to the true Disciples of Christ Jesus the Lord, to those whose salvation is entirely of the LORD.

In chapter 1, he described us as being chosen of God the Father in Christ and blessed with all spiritual blessings in him, predestinated unto the adoption of children and redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. Children of Light are those in whom God has revealed the mystery of his will which he purposed in himself.

In chapter 2, he described us as those who were once children of darkness, among whom we all had our conduct, even as others. Only one made us to differ, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us." God quickened us together with Christ his Son. He gave us the gift of faith, not of works, but by his grace. By Christ's work he made us fellowcitizens and of the household of God. Children of Light are those in whom God dwells in Spirit.

In chapter 3, he declares that he did so through the light of the gospel: Paul preached "the unsearchable riches of Christ." He said that he was sent that through the gospel all God's elect might see. We need Light to see.

In chapter 4, he encouraged us by speaking of the awesome responsibility and privilege we have of sending forth the gospel in Light.

In chapter 5, for the sake of bearing witness of Christ the Light, he gives us particulars of things to avoid and things to do. Speaking of "the children of disobedience", he said, "Be not ye therefore partakers with them. For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light." (Eph 5: 8) There he spoke of the children of darkness themselves, telling us not to be partakers with them.

Our text begins in verse 11. Here he speaks of believers not being in fellowship with their works. The Holy Spirit says through the apostle Paul, "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*." (Eph 5: 11) That is, shine Light on the unfruitful works of darkness.

Unfruitful works of darkness include moral, self-righteous, religious, sinful works, as well as obvious, immoral, sinful works. Here is the chief point. We cannot bring sinners to the Light of Christ by fellowshipping with the unfruitful works of darkness but rather we reprove sinners by the Light of the gospel of Christ.

NO FELLOWSHIP

First, we are instructed to have no fellowship with them, "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness." (Eph 5: 11)

At least, four things are included in having “no fellowship with unfruitful works of darkness”. The first is obvious, do not do them.

Two, do not be an accessory to them. Do not be accessory to them by provoking or consenting to unfruitful works of darkness. Also, do not be accessory to unfruitful works of darkness by failing to prevent or repress them. For example, Eli’s son’s self-serving, religious sins became Eli’s sin because he did nothing to stop them. Also, by applauding works of darkness we become accessory to their sins—“Woe to those that call evil good, that strengthen the arms of the wicked.” Furthermore, we become accessory to unfruitful works of darkness by not speaking out against them. A failure to speak against unfruitful works of darkness gives others the impression that we approve of them.

Three, have no fellowship with unfruitful works of darkness by “avoiding the appearance of evil.”

Four, have no fellowship with unfruitful works of darkness by detesting them in our heart and affections. The Ephesians not only avoided the works of Nicolaitans, Christ Jesus said, “But this thou hast, thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.” (Rev 2: 6) The deeds of the Nicolaitans were religious sins. All free-will, self-righteous religious works are included in these unfruitful works of darkness.

When we see how much is involved in “having no fellowship with works of darkness” it makes a believer pray, with David, “Lord, cleanse thou me from secret *faults*.” (*Ps 19: 12*) We do not hate sin nearly as God does or as we ought. Another thing it brings to mind is how holy our Savior was when he walked this earth. He always pleased his Father. He never had fellowship with the works of darkness. Also, it makes us realize the multitude of sins he bore when he bore all the sins of all God’s elect people. When Christ purged us of our sins, perfecting us forever by his one offering, he bore away a multitude of secret sins which we are not even able to see.

UNFRUITFUL WORKS

Also, notice he calls these works, “unfruitful.” Sin of every kind produces nothing good or beneficial; sin only produces shame and death. The Holy Spirit said through Paul to believers, “What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.” (Rom 6: 21)

Think of a thorn bush. A spiritually dead sinner is a thorn bush, whether he is the most moral religious man or a base, immoral sinner. Christ said, “Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?” Spiritually dead sinners, no matter how moral, no matter how religious, are the same as the most evil of sinners. All we could produce were “unfruitful works of darkness.”

It is because all the works of the unregenerate—even moral works—puff up and exalt the sinner and dishonor God. Also, by teaching others that they can be saved by their works, they do harm to their neighbor, as well. Furthermore, underneath the disguise of religion, they are still coming from a heart full of evil and enmity against God.

When we were dead in sins in our flesh, all our attempts of finding acceptance with God by the works of the law were unfruitful works of darkness the same as the sins of breaking the law. It is because we were guilty in Adam. Also, it was because our nature was sinful, selfish, self-exalting, seeking God’s glory for ourselves, while making light of sin and of God’s law and holiness. It was all iniquity because it was inequitable, not coming up to God’s holiness and righteousness.

The only thing that could be done for us is for us to be saved in Light and Truth. Our old man had to die under the justice of the law by Christ taking our place on the cross. A new man had to be created within us by Christ being formed in us. That which Christ accomplished for God’s elect on the cross and that which

Christ accomplishes in God's elect is all done in Light, in Truth, through the Light of the Gospel, reprov- ing us and bringing us to Christ the Light.

Romans 7: 4: Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. 5: For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.

So we see the unfruitful works of darkness always hurt the sinner, producing shame, sickness, poverty, death and misery in the life to come. In every way sinful works are "unfruitful."

REPROVE WITH LIGHT

Next, believers are exhorted to reprove the unfruitful works of darkness with Light instead of fellowshiping with them, "But rather reprove *them*. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. But all things that are reprov- ed are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light." (Eph 5: 11-13)

Instead of having fellowship by joining in with the unfruitful works of darkness, with the vain hope that we might gain the sinners friendship then eventually be able to bring them to the Light, God says we are to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness but rather reprove them with Light.

The first reason is, "because it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret." There is a sense in which speaking of sins, even in an attempt to discredit and expose them, is shameful. Certainly, joining men in their shameful works of darkness in an attempt to befriend them, so that you can bear witness of Christ to them, will not work.

This will offend a great many but it needs to be said. Group bible studies in which everyone in the room takes turns voicing their opinions on scripture is a fairly new invention of works religion. It is altogether an unfruitful work of darkness. A well-meaning believer may think that he can use such a platform to bear witness of Christ the Light, to his friends. But it takes the Holy Spirit of God to give spiritual understanding in the heart. The means that pleases God is the means God blesses, which is gospel-preaching. It is humbling to have to submit to God's means; it is humbling to have to be silent and hear God speak through his word. But trying to bear witness in a bible study discussion-group where everyone is voicing their opinion, where instead of listening they are thinking of what they will say next, is as useless as joining men on a barstool in hopes you might bear witness to them. So-called churches today are using many other of these same tactics by teaching professing believers to dress like the world, play worldly "religious" music, even by building neon-lit night clubs where young professing believers can attend with their friends. Listen to Christ,

John 3: 19: And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20: For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov- ed.

Unregenerate sinners, especially those hiding behind the fig leaves of self-made religion, are trying to hide in the dark in secret. They are trying to hide from God, from their own conscience, from the presence of men, especially from those filled with the Light of Christ. They will not come to the Light of Christ because their deeds are evil and Christ the Light will reprove them for the fig leaves they are. That is so for the very best self-righteous religionists, with all his unfruitful works of darkness, the same as it is for the poor sinner lying in an alley.

Unless the conscience is seared past feeling, all sin has shame and fear as a companion—even the sin that we hide with the appearance of good. Though the self-righteous man does the opposite of what Christ commanded by trying to do all his religious works to be seen of men, if he would admit it, he is trying to keep his own wicked heart covered from the Light of reproof. One test of whether or not something is acceptable to God is to ask: “Would I want others to know about this: God, my brethren, my spouse, my parents, my children? Would it make me ashamed if this was found out?” If yes, it is sin.

But bless God, by God’s grace, some sinners, whom God chose in Christ according to his own will, shall be reproved by God and God will use his children to do it. Yet, God will have his people reprove with the Light God has ordained. Look carefully at verse 13.

First, is the reason we must reprove with Light, “For all things that are reproved are made manifest by the light.” (Eph 5: 13) Sinners must be reproved. There is no way around it. But darkness is only made known by the Light. Without reproof in the Light of Christ, their sins will not be reproved and revealed in true Light. The second part of verse 13 declares why this is so. It is because Light is the only thing that reveals sin, “for whatsoever doth make manifest is light.” Darkness will never make another see their sins of darkness. Only the Light of Christ makes a sinner see his sin.

So the only way to awake someone is by reproofing them and the only way to reprove is with the Light of the gospel of Christ. So we must be walking as children of Light. Our walk is what Paul is focusing on. Our walk includes the means we use to declare the Light. The Light of Christ divinely revealed through God’s ordained means of gospel preaching is the way sinners will be made to see their sins and flee to Christ when God makes the word effectual in their heart.

We assemble together and exhort one another through the preaching and hearing of the gospel. It is Christ, the Head of the church, who receives the glory for gathering his redeemed together in the assembly where he has sent his gospel preacher; it is Christ who gives the ability to hear through the Holy Spirit. By this means no flesh is allowed to glory in Christ’s presence but those in whom the word is made effectual glory only in the Lord. We use this means so that the sinner’s faith stands in the power of God rather in the wisdom of men.

1 Corinthians 1: 17: For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. 18: For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. 19: For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. 20: Where *is* the wise? where *is* the scribe? where *is* the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21: For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. 22: For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: 23: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; 24: But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. 25: Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. 26: For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*: 27: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; 28: And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, *yea*, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: 29 That no flesh should glory in his presence. 30: But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: 31: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

1 Corinthians 2: 1: And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. 2: For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. 3: And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. 4: And my speech and my preaching *was* not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: 5: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

AN EXAMPLE OF GOD'S METHOD OF GRACE

Next, in verse 14 of our text, Paul is not quoting a particular scripture. The "wherefore" refers back to verse 13. Paul said, "But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light." "Wherefore [God] saith..." He is giving us an example, reminding believers that this is what God does when he gives Life and Light through the gospel. The word preached reprov's and with it Christ gives Light.

First, comes the reproof, "Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead..." That is the reproof. While the reproof is going forth, with it "And Christ shall give thee light." (Eph 5: 14) It is like the valley of dry bones, where God said to the preacher, "Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD." That is the reproof that comes through the preaching of the gospel. But how can dry bones come alive and hear? As the word went forth, "Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live:" (Eze 37:4-5)

Paul says, "Reprove the works of darkness in Light and for only the Light will manifest darkness." He said, "Here is proof. God himself reprov's in Light and as he does Christ shall give thee Light." That is what happened to us when we were born-again and it is what Christ continues to do through the gospel, especially when we need reproof for our sin. The Lord calls on us in the gospel, saying, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead." And Christ enters in, in Spirit, giving us Life and Light to obey God's reproof.

Paul declares the power of reproof, accompanied with the Light of Christ, in another passage. This is where he taught the Corinthians it is better if all the preachers preach the gospel of Christ rather than speak in the gift of foreign languages. This will be the effectual result when Christ enters in the heart with his Light through the preaching of the gospel,

1 Corinthians 14: 24: But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: 25: And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.

We may think that by fellowshiping with works of darkness we can gain the friendship of sinners then bear witness to them. That is exactly what false religion does with all their sports and programs, with their watered-down sermons on current events and so on. It is not love to a sinner and not glorifying to our Savior. If we make sinners feel we are in fellowship with them while they walk in darkness it only makes them feel comfortable to go on in sin and they will never see their need of Christ. Sinners must hear of the depravity of the heart. They must hear that God chose whom he would, that salvation is by God's choice not our will. Christ makes his people willing in the day of his power. (Ps 110: 3) Sinners must hear that Christ accomplished the redemption of his people himself. Sinners must be reprov'd by the Light of Christ.

Brethren, God our Father chose us, sent his own Son who redeemed each of his people, he has birthed us into his family, we have been called by Christ the Light, given the privilege of holding forth the word of Life. His command is walk as children of Light. Speak the gospel of Christ the Light. Light is how we bear witness of Christ but fellowshiping with the works of darkness will make us lose our witness.

The way that unregenerate sinners—in works religion and out—naturally vex us with “unfruitful works of darkness”—in their walk, words and works—is how we ought to naturally reprove them by walking as children of Christ the Light. If sinners feel as comfortable sinning around us as their normal sinful companions, then that ought to reprove us that we are not walking and speaking as children of Christ. Our text implies that if that is the case, then we are in fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, rather than reprovng them.

So let’s heed this important exhortation, “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord *is*. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;” (Eph 5:15-20)

Amen!