



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Ephesians 5:3-14

Ephesians

"Awake, Sleepers!"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Ephesians 5:3-14: "But do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater" – I think he's equating covetousness there with idolatry – that any such person "has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light (for the fruit of light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord."

Now, I want to make a comment on verse 9 because some of you may be reading from the Authorized Version, the King James Version, and if that's the case, then verse 9 reads, "For the fruit of the Spirit is goodness" and so forth. There are two readings that the Greek text shows, and one is that in the Authorized Version, but the other is what I have, at least in the New American Standard Bible, the "fruit of light," and the textual evidence is much more in favor of this reading, of light rather than the Spirit, and so probably the reason for the difference in readings, the difference in the two translations, is that some of those manuscripts, scribes who were writing them down

changed it from light to Spirit with Ephesians 5:22 in mind, the fruit of the Spirit, and of course that would fit with the idea. What Paul is describing here is ultimately the fruit of the Spirit, but I think the better reading supports this of the fruit of light fits the context and it's much easier to understand how someone would change it from light to Spirit, so we're going to take it as it is in the New American Standard Bible, "For the fruit of light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth, trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. For this reason it says, 'Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'"

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study together. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Gracious God and Heavenly Father, we are thankful for the fact that we can be here this morning, that we can open the Bible and we can study your Word, which is your revelation to us, which is your light, and it is a great gift. How often we take it for granted, and yet we have what is truth. In fact, it is in this light that we see light, as the psalmist tells us. It is as we come to understand the truth of your Word that we can understand truth, that we can understand life, that we can understand who we are, where we're going, what we're to be doing, why things are what they are.

Father, you have blessed us greatly with your light, and you have blessed us greatly with the great revelation in your Son, who is the light of the world, with the salvation that we have in Him, and we thank you for that. Thank you that you sent Him into the world to die for sinners, to teach, to teach your truth, to be an example to us on how to live but principally to die as the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Thank you for your Son and the life that you give in Him to all who believe. May the things we do this morning

honor His name and may we, as we consider the fact that in Him we are light, may we be moved and encouraged to live in that way.

So bless us, Father, as we study. Bless our thinking, bless our time together. May it be a time of edification. May we be built up in the faith through the things we study, and may we have a desire to go from this place and walk as children of light, live lives that are exemplary, lives that show to the world your grace.

We pray for our other needs, Father. We pray for our physical needs. We thank you for what you give us, you give us much, and we thank you for the way you care for us and that you are faithful every day at every moment. We pray for those who are in particular need, for the sick and for the unemployed, for those who are struggling with various difficulties. We pray that you'd give them encouragement. We pray that you would resolve family problems. We pray that you would give healing.

We pray that in the midst of difficulty you might give the encouragement that one can have, really have, with an understanding of who you are and what you are doing, that you are using all things together for our good, so we thank you for that.

We pray, Lord, for our meeting this evening as we come back and celebrate the Lord's death and His resurrection. We pray that you would bless us. We pray that you'd prepare our hearts for that and may it be a profitable time together. We thank you that He came. We thank you that He is coming again, and we look forward to that day. May we live in light of it and may our time together now be a preparation of heart, preparing us for the week to come, that we would live in a way that anticipates His coming and know that the life we live is short, the end is coming, Christ is returning. May we live for that.

Bless us as we sing our final hymn. Prepare our hearts with it. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] In 1937, as Germany was rearming for war, Winston Churchill wrote a book entitled *While England Slept*. John Kennedy

later published his senior thesis at Harvard under the title "Why England Slept." It was a take-off on Churchill's title, but Churchill's book was a warning to his nation, a nation that he felt was sleeping. Sleep is a blessing but it can be dangerous.

In time of war, a city can fall if the watchman falls asleep, and that's true in spiritual matters as well. Christians can lose their spiritual edge, become dull, become indifferent, and as a result fail to see the dangers that we face. Like the sluggard who says a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, Solomon says your poverty will come in like a vagabond and your need like an armed man.

The devil wants us sleeping. He works to put us to sleep and he's tireless in that. As far as we know, the devil and his minions, they never sleep. So Paul calls the church to awake. That's how he ends the passage, "Awake, sleeper." We are to be alert and we are to be active. Christians have much to do, and Paul informs the Ephesians of what they are to be doing. In verse 8 he says, "You are light . . . walk as children of light." Christians face many dangers, and if we are not alert, if we are not walking as children of light, then those dangers will overwhelm us. So Paul begins by alerting us to the threats, to the temptations that we face throughout this section on Christian duty.

Paul gives warnings and he gives exhortations. He sort of moves from the negative to the positive and back to the negative and so forth. He has been on the positive. He has instructed the Ephesians to imitate God and Christ, to be kind, forgiving, to be sacrificing. Well, he now moves to the negative. He moves from self-sacrifice to self-indulgence, to the kind of conduct that must be avoided. In verse 3, he warns against fornication, impurity, and greed, sins that particularly characterize the pagan world of Paul's day and sins that were prevalent in the city of Ephesus.

Ephesus, as we have pointed out, was one of the great cosmopolitan cities of the Roman empire. It was a seaport city. It

was a city of commerce, a city with wealth, and a city of idolatry. Its principal religion was that of Diana or Artemis, it was the capital of the cult of Artemis. Her temple in Ephesus was one of the seven wonders of the world and associated with sensuality. She was considered a fertility goddess. Status of Artemis represent her with many breasts, and the worship of Artemis involved ritual prostitution, sexual orgies, so immorality was common in Ephesus as it was throughout Asia, as it is in America today.

There is probably little difference morally between Ephesus and New York City – or Dallas, for that matter. Our city, our nation, is awash in sexual propaganda. Advertising plays to two great themes: sex and greed. A lust for money and pleasure. Not by presenting reality to us but rather by presenting it in an unrealistic way, by presenting it without a sense of reality. James Dobson speaks of airbrushed nudity, and that's how it's done. That's how the images are presented to us so often. They remove all of the flaws, all of the defects, to present something that is in appearance perfect and enticing, and we are surrounded by it.

Well, they were surrounded by it in Paul's day as well. They didn't have the technique and the technology that we have, but they had the temptations. They were very prevalent. It was commonly accepted as a norm of behavior. The standards of human conduct in Paul's day as in our day were very low. But Paul didn't lower the standards of the church in order to make it more palatable for new Christians or more attractive to pagans; in fact, he does the opposite. He raised the standards and he raised them very high. He said that such behavior was not even to be named among them. It goes without saying that it's not to be done, but he says not even to be named among them.

Now, Paul doesn't mean that an honest, helpful discussion of sex is inappropriate. It's not. Sex is a gift of God for marriage. It should be understood as being for that and it should be well understood. But

he is warning against a distorted view of sex, an exploitive use of sex, which he says is immorality. That's our translation for the word. The Greek word that is translated immorality is the word *porneia*. The word *porné* is the Greek word for prostitute. We get our word "pornography" from it, which indicates that Paul's meaning has a sharper edge to it than what might be suggested by this word "immorality."

In fact, F. F. Bruce criticizes translations such as "immorality" or "unchastity" as being what he calls mealy-mouthed for refusing to call it what it is and that is fornication. Strictly speaking, the word refers to the use of a prostitute but it was used more broadly than that. It was used to include all kinds of sexual misconduct, fornication, adultery, perversion. Paul says such sins should not be named, meaning they should not be mentioned in an approving or in a tolerant way. Goes quite contrary to the way these things are discussed in our society. There was a time when they wouldn't be discussed in what we call polite society, but now it's very common.

And it's not discussed in a critical way but in an open-minded way. Paul says there's no place for that. These things are not to be treated in a so-called open-minded, tolerant way, they're to be condemned. We are not even to entertain in our minds thoughts of immorality, thoughts of impurity, and so, for example, in our conversations, we should be careful to avoid discussing them as, for example, as we discuss a person's past sins. Those things sometimes come up when we are talking about a person's conversion and what their life was like in the past, and as we discuss that, we may get into the sordid details of it. That's a dangerous thing. It is never healthy to bring those things into our mind.

They could be discussed to a degree, I think, but Paul is calling for caution here, and we should be very careful what we allow to enter into our minds. Later, in verse 12, Paul refers to the sins that men commit in secret and says that it is disgraceful even to speak of them. We're to be very discerning about what we allow into our minds, very

discriminating on that point, because the things that we think about influence the things that we do, what we become. Too much exposure to evil, whether it be in the things that we talk about, in the things that we read, in the things that we watch, can be destructive. It can have a very destructive effect upon our thinking. It can make us insensitive to things that are wrong.

Alexander Pope, a few hundred years ago, the English poet, was very insightful on this and he put it to verse. I've read this before but I think it applies, and it's a very good statement. He says vice is a monster of such frightful mien that to be hated needs but to be seen; but seen too oft, familiar with her face, we first endure, then pity, then embrace. And that's the way it happens. That's the progression of the devolution of it all. We're first confronted with some heinous sin and we're repelled by it, it's revolting to us. And the second time we see it, it might have that same effect, maybe not to the same degree, but still it's revolting.

But you see it a third or fourth time and then you become a little indifferent to it. You may not approve of it, but it doesn't have the same shock value that it originally had, and when one continues to see these things, eventually it's no longer a neutral attitude but one becomes sympathetic with it. As he says, "seen too oft, familiar with her face, we first endure, then pity, then embrace," and I think we see that very clearly in our own society. Things that would not have been spoken about in a previous generation now are not only spoken about but accepted, not even challenged as to whether they're good or bad, and so to protect us from that, Paul says don't even allow these things to be named among you.

This leads on to other things to be avoided. Verse 4: And there must be no filthiness and silly talk or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. In other words, avoid obscene language and filthy jokes. There's no place for those kinds of things in our conversation. They're not fitting for a saint to have in his or her conversations. Ephesians were evidently notorious for that kind of

humor. Literature from Paul's day suggests that, and admittedly that stuff can be funny.

It wouldn't be a problem if it wasn't and Paul recognized that, but our response to low humor when we laugh at it or when we even, say, try to stifle it or bite our lip to keep from laughing, that really says more about us than it does about the humor itself. Tells us the kind of condition our heart is in that that would appeal to it. And aside from the fact that such humor is dishonoring to God, it also has an effect upon us, the same thing that we were just mentioning. When we are made to laugh at violence or laugh at seduction or laugh at impurity, we are made insensitive to it. We become a little callous toward things that really aren't funny at all. So we're to avoid that kind of talk.

Not to avoid humor – Paul's not condemning humor. He's not trying to put our conversation in a straightjacket. Humor and wit are good. They are gifts of God and it's good to laugh. Christians should not be seen as drab and dreary people who never smile or never laugh or never enjoy life. We should, we should enjoy it more than anyone else, and when there are things to laugh at, we should be laughing, we should enjoy that, but laughing at the right things.

That no doubt was a problem for these Ephesians with whom coarse jesting had been a way of life. I'm sure many of them came into the Christian faith with a whole repertoire of those kinds of jokes that had helped them make their way through society well, and they had enjoyed the laughter and the amusement that they had brought, but they were no longer to use that kind of language or that kind of humor.

When we come to faith, we are new creatures. We are made completely new. That's what we are, new creatures in Christ. But the change is usually not obvious immediately. The change that occurs in a man or woman the moment they believe is not as apparent to us as it will be later. When a man believes, he may not appear to others any different immediately after than he was just before then. He may not appear to be different though he is. Justification is an immediate act of God and it is

a complete act of God. When we are justified by God, at the moment of faith, we are declared righteous, we are forgiven of all of our sins, we are received by God as completely acceptable in His sight.

That's justification. It is an immediate and a complete act. Sanctification, on the other hand, the work of God in which He cleans up our character and conduct, that's something different. That begins at justification and that continues on all through our life. It is a progressive process, a lifelong process, and Paul is giving us some direction here on the way that that progress should go. As we grow in Christ, as we develop as Christians, we should be putting off certain kinds of behavior, certain kinds of characteristics. We should be putting off crude and filthy talk. That takes discipline on our part. But the way to do that is not simply to abstain from doing it.

It's not simply to not talk, not to say those kinds of things anymore. That may be part of it but that's not the whole of it. In fact, Paul's advice always moves from the negative to the positive, and so he says don't simply abstain, don't simply be quiet, but when you speak, be thankful. In other words, replace the negative with the positive – give thanks. Now, how do we do that? Well, I don't think he means simply say things that are thankful without really meaning it. In order to say a thankful thing, in order to express thanks, it must be within our hearts. It must be genuine. It must be something that we truly hold with conviction, we are truly thankful. That's when thanks comes out in the way we talk and the things that we say.

So to have that kind of attitude, in order to be genuinely thankful people, we must remember what God has done for us, all that we have to be thankful about. So we remember what Christ has done for us, that on the cross, all of our sins, all of our corrupt conversation, all of our evil deeds were laid on Him, every one of them, and He bore the punishment for them in our place. We will never be punished for those sins. Christ has taken them all and He has separated them as far as the east is from the west – past, present, and future. That's something to be greatly

thankful to God about. He has justified us, He has forgiven us of all of our sins, and there are many blessings that flow from that, many blessings that flow from the cross.

Christ has given us the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity literally lives within us, and Paul makes a great deal of that in this book. So we now have the power to live the kind of life that He has called us to live, we have the Spirit of God within us to enable us to do that, and that's something to thank God for. And there are so many temporal blessings as well. You should thank God for your wife. That is the woman He has given to you. That is the husband that He has given to you. You should be thankful. You should be thankful for your parents. You should be thankful for the position that He has given you because all of these things are given to us by God who knows what is best for us, and they are working together for our good and His glory.

There are so many temporal blessings that we are to be thankful for, so many eternal blessings that we are to be thankful for. In Colossians 3:2, Paul says set your mind on the things above. Think about those things. Think about what is awaiting you for all eternity. More than you can imagine. Set your mind on that. Just thinking of all the things that we have to be thankful for is a healthy exercise, and in verse 5, Paul gives the reason for doing that, the reason for being thankful, the reason for avoiding sensuality and greed, the reason for his principles of conduct. It's because sensual people will not go to heaven.

Verse 5: For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. That means – Paul, in saying this, means that no practicing sensualist, no unrepentant sinner, has eternal life. The person whose life is characterized by such behavior has no place in the kingdom of Christ and God. The man or woman who persists in sin, in sensuality, shows that he or she is excluded, is outside of the kingdom of God. And that includes greed or covetousness. He calls it idolatry because it gives the acquisition of

things first place in a person's life, and very often immorality and greed go together.

Both are essentially the same. They have to do with taking. They have to do with self-gratification. So Paul says that the person who is persistent in those things has no inheritance to come. Now, Paul is not suggesting by that that we gain eternal life, we gain a place in the kingdom, by putting away evil deeds, by cleaning up our life by good works. Paul has made very clear in this book that such is not the case. Man is saved by grace through faith, faith alone. He's made that point very clearly in Ephesians 2:8-9 and all that we have is a gift. We have received it - can't work to earn it. And Paul doesn't mean that the Christian cannot fall into sin.

Christians can fall in to sin. Christians do fall into sin. We struggle with sin every day of our lives, but I think that's the issue. We struggle with sins, we do not persist in them. We may persist for a time, but the man or the woman of God who is born of God will come to a realization of the wrongness of it, will come into the conviction through the discipline of God, and confess that sin. Persistence in sensuality and immorality is an evidence that there is no true spiritual life, that such a person has never experienced saving grace, and that goes on. One reason it goes on is people believe that they can live lives as though there are no consequences for their behavior.

Well, Paul is very clear: thoughts and deeds have consequences. The things that we bring into our minds have an effect, have a consequence, and that effect, that consequence leads to actions that have consequences, and in verse 6 he warns against listening to those who suggest anything different. He says their words are empty. They deceive. They give a false sense of security, and the result is, the consequences is, the wrath of God. Solomon writes that there is a way which seems right to a man but its end is the way of death, and there

are many men in this generation in which we live – they've always been around – who will say that there are no consequences.

That there's no day of reckoning to come. Someday those who deny grace, those who mock sin and judgment, will be swept away in it. In fact, the wrath of God presently abides on them, presently abides on the unbeliever. That's what John tells us in John 3:36, and that may be, at least in part, Paul's meaning here because he puts his statement in the present tense. It comes, the wrath of God comes, presently, and it abides. And the effects of sin become evident in a person's life with the scars that sin leaves on the soul and it always, always scars the soul. There's no such thing as a benign sin. Every sin that we commit, every evil deed that we bring into our mind is like a razor blade that cuts.

It leaves its effect. Has its effect in a person's conduct, in their character, in this life. But ultimately, of course, the full manifestation of sin and its consequences comes at the end of the age with the judgment to come. And so Paul says in verse 7: Do not be partakers with them, meaning don't share their false ideas. The fate of the unbeliever is reason enough to avoid their thoughts and their conduct, and Paul has warned us along those lines, but he gives another reason in verse 8, and that is our position. A change has occurred and we now have a new identity. Paul writes: For you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light.

What is immediately striking about that statement is Paul doesn't say you were formerly in darkness but you were darkness. Darkness is symbolic of ignorance, error, evil. Satan's realm is called the domain of darkness, and so while it is true that before we came to faith in Christ we did walk in darkness, we were under its influence, we were living in error, we were blind, we were practicing evil, here Paul is saying we formerly were part of that darkness and not just victims of it but we were actually contributors to it. We were members of that

domain of darkness that is Satan's. We practiced it, we promoted it, we contributed to it.

There is no neutrality in spiritual matters. A person is either darkness or light, and those who are outside of Christ who are in unbelief are under the dominion of Satan. But grace changes that. Christ delivers. That's the power of the gospel. In Colossians 1:13, Paul writes that God delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son. That's what God has done for us through the cross, through the effectual calling of the Holy Spirit, He's brought us to faith. He saved us by the death of His son and brought us into His Son's kingdom. Here Paul says the change is from darkness to light.

You were darkness but now you are light, and that's what we are, that's what we now are. He's not saying that's what you will become, he's saying that is what you now are, and so as you look at yourself, as you consider who you are as a Christian, you must consider that you are light. That's what Jesus Christ has made you. For all of the inestimable blessings that await us in heaven, that await us in the world to come, the blessings that we presently enjoy are also beyond our comprehension. That's why Paul back in chapter 1 prayed that the Ephesians would be enlightened, so that they would come to know, come to understand and appreciate what is the surpassing greatness of God's power toward us who believe.

We have the surpassing power of God at work in us at this present moment. It's alive within us through the Holy Spirit, and here Paul is saying that if you're a Christian, if you're in Christ, you are light. That's what Christ said of Himself. You remember in John 8:12, He stands up in the temple and said, "I am the light of the world." And Paul is saying in the Lord, in Christ, we are light also. Not originators of light, as Christ is; we are those who reflect His light. Donald Ray Barnhouse illustrated our relationship to Christ from the relationship of the moon to the sun.

When the sun sets and the moon comes up, it gives off light. Doesn't give off its own light. The moon has no light of its own. It gives off the light of the sun as it reflects that light, and when the moon is full, it shines so brightly that we can see clearly at night. We don't need a lantern or something to see our way through the streets when the moon is full, we can see in the light of the moon. Well, that's a picture of the believer. It's a picture of the church. The church shines, not with its own light but with the reflected light of Christ. But the moon has different phases. Sometimes it's a full moon, sometimes a half moon, sometimes a crescent that really is just a sliver of light in the darkness.

The church, too, has its different phases. The days of Paul and Luther and Wesley were days of great enlightenment. But there have been other times when the church hasn't given off that might light, when it's just been something like a sliver of light and there was great darkness all around. Like the moon, the church waxes and wanes. Paul says we're to wax. He says we're to shine brightly, walk as children of light. In other words, let your conduct, let your speech be consistent with what you are, and you are light. God has made us to reflect His light, and He has given us the ability to do that, and so we're to do that. That's the point of Paul's statement. We're to walk as a child of the light.

Paul was fond of this word "walk" as a description of the Christian life. He uses it frequently and it expresses the idea that the Christian life is slow but steady progress, and in verse 9 he gives three characteristics of that life, three areas in which we should be progressing, we should be increasing, things that should be seen in our life, what he calls the fruit of light. Now, light, of course, doesn't give fruit, it doesn't bear fruit, so Paul is mixing his metaphors here. But light can be broken down into different colors as it is diffracted through a prism or through cut glass. Maybe Paul is thinking of something like that, maybe that's the idea he has in mind.

You've probably seen something like that, maybe some light has come through the window and it's passed through some cut glass, some crystals, and on the wall you see different colors as that light is diffracted. You see violet and blue and green and yellow, different colors of the light spectrum. Well, maybe that's his idea here. He says that the colors of light, the fruit of the light that is to be reflected in our lives are of three kinds, three different ones. He says goodness and righteousness and truth. That's to be seen in us. That's to be reflected in our character.

Kent Hughes records a story that Corrie ten Boom told about her father that illustrates the point. Her father had a watchmaking business and once when the family was in extreme financial need, she observed his conduct one day with a wealthy customer. The wealthy man had decided to purchase an expensive watch with cash, and the amount of that cash would have met all of the family's needs. But as her father was handling the cash, the customer related that he was buying the watch because Mr. ten Boom's younger competitor couldn't fix his old watch, which was an expensive timepiece.

So Mr. ten Boom asked to see it. He opened it up, made a slight adjustment, and handed it back, saying, "There, that was a very little mistake. It will be fine now. Sir, I trust the young watchmaker. Someday he will be just as good as his father. So if you ever have a problem with one of his watches, come to me, I'll help you out. Now I shall give you back your money and you return my watch." Corrie ten Boom said that she was horrified as she saw the exchange and then observed her father open the door for the man and bowed deeply in his old-fashioned way. When the man had left, she says she flew at her father for the exchange that had taken place.

She rebuked him only to be rebuked by his patient response. He looked over his steel-rimmed glasses and he asked, "Corrie, what do you think that young man would have said when he learned that one of his good customers had gone to Mr. ten Boom? Do you think that the name of the Lord would be honored? As for the money, trust the

Lord, Corrie. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills and He will take care of us." Now, that's the kind of character that reflects trust in God. It reflects the truth of God. It reflects the character of God, the righteousness and the goodness of God, and it comes from trusting in the Lord.

But to trust in the Lord, to live a life that reflects that kind of light must be a life that is living in His light. The moon can't reflect the sun's light if it's out of the light, and we must be living in Christ's light, we must be living in connection with Him every day if we are to reflect that light and reflect that character.

You'll remember when Moses came down from Mount Sinai after he had been in the presence of the Lord for a number of days, when he came down from that mount, his face was shining with the glory of God. He didn't realize it but everyone saw it. And ours will be shining as well, not with a literal light but our faces, our lives, will reflect the character of God as we spend time with God, and we do that in our time of study. We meet God every day on the pages of the Bible, we fellowship with Him there, and as we seek to know Him and learn about Him and grow in that knowledge of Him, we grow. We grow in His character. We reflect that more and more, and so that's what we're to seek to do, seek to know Him.

We are to walk as children of light and Paul adds in verse 10 that while we do that, we are to be learning what is pleasing to the Lord. Now, that word "learn" means to test or to prove, and so as we walk, as we seek to live the Christian life, we are to be putting our thoughts and our actions to the test and adjusting them by what we learn pleases the Lord. The Christian life involves discernment. The Christian life involves discretion, putting things to the test, and of course we measure the things of our life, the thoughts of our life, the deeds of our lives, the decisions that we will make, by the Word of God and through the enlightenment that the Holy Spirit gives to us.

Whatever passes that test, whatever passes the test of the Word of God, is pleasing to the Lord and those are the things that we are to

be doing, but to be able to do that, we must know the Word of God, we must know the character of God, we must know who God is. That's one of the greatest studies that we can engage in, learning who God is. And as we do, we come to know what pleases Him, and that's what we're to strive to emulate.

Now, since we are to seek to please the Lord, since we are to live as light and produce the fruit of light, it follows that we are to have nothing to do with darkness. Paul said that in verse 7 but he repeats it here in verse 11: Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness. Notice Paul says we're to avoid the deeds, not the doers of the deeds. Paul is not advocating separatism. Christ didn't separate Himself. He was a friend of tax gatherers and sinners. He went where they were. He ate with them. He got to know them and He was criticized by the Pharisees for doing it.

Their criticism had the force of a guilt by association, but the Lord wasn't guilty of any deeds of darkness. He was pure, He is pure, He is light, and He brought light into the darkness, and in doing that, He exposed their sin, those with whom He associated, by the purity of His life, the purity of the truth of His words, and the result was many followed Him. He was criticized but He was followed by others whose sins had been revealed and who had come to faith in Him.

Now, that's what we're to be doing. As we associate with people, they should see something different about us, something virtuous in us, something uncompromising in us, not something self-righteous in us. We're not to go about condemning people. They're to see something righteous in us. They should see the life of Christ in us and that life will expose their life. J. B. Phillips paraphrases this, "Let your lives show by contrast how dreary and futile these things are." That's the idea but not the whole of it.

There are occasions which call for comment, for a verbal response, for saying that something is wrong, for calling sin what it is. To ignore evil is really to encourage it. So we're to speak about it on occasions. Speak about it in the right way but with clarity, with

kindness, with humility. Sometimes we don't expose sin because we really just don't take it seriously. Paul took it very seriously. He says in verse 12 that it is disgraceful even to speak of the things that some men do in secret. The fact that they do things in secret shows that even the men who do them know that they are shameful and they shouldn't be seen, and so they try to hide their evil, but nothing can be hidden.

Paul says in verse 13: But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. Wherever light penetrates, darkness is dispelled. And wherever the light of Christ goes, whether it is in the lives of the Christians or it is in the gospel that we give, shameful things are exposed. Error is exposed, the things that are wrong become clear. That last phrase, "everything that becomes visible is light," may mean that as we expose error, as the light of God's truth shines upon it and shines on those who do such things, they are changed.

Not only are their deeds exposed, but in the exposure of their deeds and their sin, they come to a realization of their sinfulness, they come to faith, they are converted, they become light. That may be what Paul means here. That certainly is true. The Greek is difficult but it certainly means that through the light of Christ and the gospel and the Word of God, we, his church, expose sin and unbelief. Now, that's what we're to be doing. We are lights and so we are to be shining in the darkness of this world.

The passage concludes with Paul giving an exhortation to do that in verse 14. He exhorts us with a quotation: Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you. The source of that quote is not certain. Some think that it may be an early Christian hymn because we don't find it in those words in the Old Testament, but more likely it is a paraphrase of an Old Testament passage, maybe Isaiah 60:1 or perhaps a combination of Old Testament passages, but the meaning is clear enough. Christians are to be alert, Christians are to be active, we are to shake off indifference to things moral and

spiritual. We are not to be indifferent, we are light and we are to be walking as children of light.

We are to be awake. Martin Luther had a parable that he would tell of how on one occasion the devil sat on his throne listening to the reports of his agents and ambassadors on the progress that they had made in opposing the truth of Christ and destroying the souls of men. One spirit said, "There was a company of Christians crossing the desert. I loosed lions upon them and soon the sands of the desert were strewn with their mangled corpses." Satan answered, "What of that? The lions destroyed their bodies but their souls were saved. It's their souls that I am after."

Then another made his report, he said, "There was a company of Christian pilgrims sailing through the sea on a vessel. I sent a great wind against the ship and drove the ship on the rocks and every Christian on board was drowned in the sea." And again Satan said, "What of that? Their bodies were drowned in the sea, but their souls were saved. It is their souls that I am after." Then a third came forward and gave his report, and he said, "For ten years I have been trying to cast a Christian into a deep sleep, and at last I have succeeded." And with that the corridors of hell rang with shouts of malignant triumph.

There are many chapters of church history that could be entitled "While the Church Slept." There have been times when the church - when Christians were indifferent to doctrine, indifferent to Bible study, when the church lacked knowledge and discernment as it always will when it's indifferent to the study of Scripture, when it's indifferent to the doctrines of the Word of God, and when that happens, when Christians and when the church loses really any interest in it, when it just doesn't care about the truth, then it doesn't stand for the truth and it doesn't care about that which is good and that which is kind.

Well, if that's true of you, if that is true of any of us, we're always under that danger of getting drowsy and drifting and falling asleep. If that's true of anyone in here, if that's true of myself, then Paul has a word, he says, "Awake, sleeper. Awake and walk as a child of the light." Or as Paul says in Romans 13:11, "And this do knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed." In other words, wake up, the time is short, and the end is near. Christ will come soon.

When Augustine was a young pagan sitting in a garden in Milan under great conviction of sin, he heard a child somewhere on the other side of a wall singing a little song. The song was, "Take it and read, take it and read," and so Augustine did just that, took up his Bible, and he just opened it at random and he opened it to that passage, Romans 13:11, which is Paul's wake-up call to Christians, telling them to wake up. And goes on in the next verse, in verse 12, and tells them to put on the armor of light. Put off the deeds of darkness. It's a passage for Christian vigilance but when Augustine read it, it became to him a gospel text. He read it and he came to faith.

That wasn't what the passage was intended for, but it was used by God in that way, and so the words of our text, awake sleeper and arise from the dead, can also be applied to you if you are here this morning without Christ. If you are an unbeliever, if you are a skeptic, you need to wake up from the sleep of unbelief and come to Christ, who is the light of the world and the Savior of the world, and as the Savior of the world He promises that all who come to Him, even the worst of sinners, even the greatest of skeptics, the most hardened of unbelievers, all who come to Him shall be received by Him and not cast out.

Realize that you are a sinner and look to Christ, trust in Him who died in the place of sinners, who bore God's punishment in their place so that all who believe in Him, all who come to Him, will be forgiven, saved, and saved forever. May God help you to do that. May God help each of us to be aroused from our sleep, to wake up, put

on the light, and walk as children of the light. Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Gracious God and Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your grace. Paul tells us that we are light in the Lord, and we are not light because we generated it from within our hearts because our hearts were dead and cold, hearts of stone, but you gave life to us and with life, you gave light and you have made us children of light, and so we can now walk as children of light. And yet we must confess, Father, that we are sleepy, that we are spiritually dull so often. We lack the vigor of the new life. We lack the vision of the new life. God, give that to us.

Stir us up. Give us a longing to know you, to know your truth, and with thankful hearts live lives that are thankful, live lives that reflect the grace that you have poured into us, that you have shed for us in the shedding of your Son's blood and the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit, all that we receive, Father, may it be reflected in our lives, we pray. May we be men and women who walk as testimonies of Jesus Christ and His grace.

If there be any in attendance this morning, Lord, who do not know Christ, we pray that you would give them no rest or peace until they realize that they are lost and they are in need of a Savior and the Savior is your Son so that they might turn to Him and come to know Him whom to know is life eternal. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.