




THE COMMUNITY

Children Of Light | PURITY

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Ephesians 5:3-14

This passage is super relevant. It's very likely that the students in your group will benefit significantly if they grasp what Paul is saying here. It's also a little intimidating. This passage contains a call to holiness with a particular focus on sexual purity, and God-honoring speech. Some in your group may be uncomfortable talking about and confessing sexual sin. Do what you can to create a safe environment and pray that the Spirit will open their hearts to be honest and let the Word change them.

In truth they have nothing to fear because the gospel message is one of kindness and forgiveness. Jesus wants to free us from the power of sin in our lives so we can walk with him in holiness. As such Paul doesn't just wag his finger and tell people to be good. He believes that the gospel is true and therefore his readers are children of light. They just need to live out their new natures.

His basic approach as summarized in v. 8 is two-fold. One, he reminds us of the change Jesus produced in our life "you once were darkness, now you are light in the Lord." And two, he calls us to take hold of the new life God has given us. "Live as children of light." Being in Christ, we have both the desire: "new attitude of your minds" (4:23), and the resources: "every spiritual blessing in Christ" (1:3-14) to obey God's instructions here.

This verse is a great summary of the book of Ephesians and Paul's entire theology. It describes our old condition (darkness), our new condition (light in the Lord) and the resulting obligation. The first sentence summarizes Ephesians 1-3 while the second sentence summarizes Ephesians 4-6.

Though this study starts in 5:3 it's connected to all that came before it. Notice for instance that the self-indulgence of v.3 stands in stark contrast to Jesus' self-giving in v. 2. If we are in Him and identify with Him then our new self will naturally follow His self-sacrificial nature, not our former self's tendency toward self-gratification. Similarly as there is no hint of moral imperfection in Him, so there should be no hint of sexual immorality in us.

Incidentally I have found that "no hint" principal to be really helpful in my life. There are things in life and sexuality that are clearly right and things that are

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What's the Big Idea?

In this passage Paul is showing that those who once were darkness, but now are light in the Lord must live as children of the light. For those who have been renewed obedience becomes the natural out-working of their new identity in Christ.

What's the Problem?

When we slip into living according to our old nature we are prone to lustful behavior and flippant speech. These are improper for God's holy people.

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clearly wrong. When I'm in my right mind I do okay avoiding the "clearly wrong." Sometimes, though, I can justify the "grey areas." The call to allow no hint of sexual immorality motivates me to avoid what some might find to be grey.

As you walk your group through this it will be helpful for you to be familiar with other passages in the NT that speak directly about sexual immorality. Some of the biggies are:

1 Corinthians 6:9-20

Galatians 5:19-23

Colossians 3:5-7

1Thessalonians 4:3-8

Hebrews 12:16

Empty Words

Given our culture, v. 6 is worth focusing on as well. Nearly everything we hear about sex from our culture is deceptive. You might ask the group to list some of the messages they get from TV, movies, and magazines about sex and compare those "empty words" to what God says. We shouldn't underestimate the power that continually being lied to has on our view of sex.

Conclusion

The great thing about all this is that Paul is not calling us to a life of drudgery and oppression, but joy and peace. We are to be a happy people and a grateful people. Gratitude is the antidote for greed. As we focus on all we have in Christ, and delight in Him, the looming temptations diminish and we are freed up to live out of our new nature.

Do everything you can to help your group understand the vital connection that exists between identity and conduct. Paul is arguing that true believers have a new attitude that shapes their conduct. Help your people embrace and pursue personal moral purity – not in a legalistic sense but as a natural, Spirit-born expression of their faith and love for Jesus. It is important to recognize that they will be able to abandon impurity only to the extent they are more satisfied in Christ. God created us, saved us, and changed us to shine His glory into the world. Sexual promiscuity, selfishness, evil thoughts and evil deeds are inconsistent with God's nature and glory. We are after all, children of light.

What's Our Response?

You want to help your group see that as they delight in Christ and their new identify with Him they can embrace and pursue personal moral purity – not in a legalistic sense, but as a natural Spirit-born expression of their faith and love for Jesus.

Ephesians 5:3-14

The Questions

Q: As you read through this passage, what jumps out as significant to you?

A: Allow the group to discuss. Keep an open ear to what they saw in the passage.

Q: What is difficult to understand in this passage?

Q: Paul says that sexual immorality, impurity, covetousness, filthy or foolish talk, and crude joking have no place in a Christian community. Why? Why do you think it is improper and out of place?

A: The best answer can be found in Ephesians 5:1-2 and it has two parts. We are to be imitators of God, just like children who are enamored with their father; and we are to walk in love. It is impossible to be loving and like God when we are participating in the things Paul begins with.

Q: Verses 5-7 are like a punch to the gut. At first glance we can think that we have to be morally flawless in our behavior to be saved and that any impure thought/word/action means we are not saved. Yet, Paul focuses us in on “being deceived” and “becoming partners.” In what ways do you see our culture promoting a deceptive view on sex and sexuality while inviting people to buy in?

A: We want people to think critically about the messages movies, music, art, and pop culture communicate about sex. You want your group to see that the messages they put out aren't neutral, they entice people to buy in to thinking and behaving a certain way; often, it's the way leading to death.

Q: Paul tells us that we once “were darkness, but are now light.” How does being a Christian now motivate you toward purity?

A: Men and women aren't going to experience a desire for purity based upon “trying to keep the rules.” They will only experience growth in purity as they experience the unconditional love of God for them. Then they will want to consistently choose His ways.

Q: Sex and sexuality are often places where an immense amount of shame lives for us. None of us are “pure”. We've all sinned and/or been sinned against in the arena of our sexualities. Where do you want to grow in this area? Where does our community need to grow?

A: This could be a hard question. Some may share they want to stop certain behaviors. Some may bring up how crude joking plays a part in the life of your community. As a group, talk about the individual and corporate ways you desire growth.

Psalm 32 is a great Psalm of confession. Read it together and pray through it celebrating the forgiveness that belongs to you if you follow Christ. This could also be a great opportunity to privately or corporately confess sin. Confession moves us toward repentance, changing our attitudes and actions in response to God.

Memory Verse: for you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.

Ephesians 5:8