

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

8

WALKING IN THE LIGHT: DAILY VICTORY IN SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Ephesians 4:17–5:20

By Elizabeth B. Crawford

“I am Jesus.... I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”

Acts 26:15-18

“Certainly, by permitting heinous sin or indulging in occultism or occult religion or yielding to some other transgression, a believer limits the protection that is his in Christ.... Dare we be so naïve as Christians to believe that demonic powers will not press their claims to the limit!”

Merrill Unger

AIM OF STUDY:

- To teach that our daily choices are part of fighting against the kingdom of darkness and that as we choose to obey Jesus, we will have victory in the skirmishes and battles of life.

KEY VERSES:

“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord.”

Ephesians 5:8-10

PREPARATION:

Read over the notes on “**how to teach the Bible in small group**” and “**some practical suggestions for leading a small group discussion**” in Vineyard Church of Columbus’ *Small Group Leadership Training Manual*. Before you read over the Scripture, pray that God would give you direction for leading your group and teach you something relevant. Then read the passage and the Bible study below. **You will need to go over the questions and choose which ones you want to emphasize and which you could eliminate if your time is limited.** Note that the application questions are marked with an asterisk (*). Rather than leaving these to the end of the study, ask one or two as you work through the passage so people are being confronted by Scripture’s truths and applying them to their own lives. If you find you are falling behind schedule and need to move ahead, you could summarize some of the passage and then go to the final questions.

These studies contain more background material and information on the passages than any group will cover in a meeting. The authors are providing this for the leaders’ benefit—to help reduce your study and preparation time; to help resource you for possible questions group members may raise; and to clarify some gray areas of doctrine that may be in your mind as you prepare. Obviously we cannot exhaust any one subject in a document like this, so you may want to do further reading and discuss doctrine with your pastor. We highly recommend *The New Bible Dictionary* or *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* as excellent resources for study.

You might also want to review material included in Marlene Nathan’s small group Bible studies on *The Kingdom of God*.

OPENERS

Have you ever wondered what a difference God can make in someone's life? In sharing her testimony, one young woman in our congregation said, "When the Savior came, He changed everything!" Here's the story of how God rescued her from a world of darkness and pain and brought her into His kingdom of light, life, and freedom.

She was the oldest child in a large family whose parents had been raised in dysfunctional families. They never had enough money, and being poor was an enormous stress in her parents' lives. She grew up embarrassed about their financial situation since sometimes the power and water were turned off, and they often had to rely on local charities for clothes and meals.

As a child, a neighbor and some relatives outside her immediate family sexually abused her. She lived in rough neighborhoods where violence, drugs and prostitution were common. She felt depressed, unlovable, and alone at home and at school. Tragically she was raped at a schoolmate's house, but she never got any comfort or help to deal with the trauma. As stress increased on the family, violence erupted at home. To deal with her pain, this girl began to disassociate and started smoking pot by age sixteen.

Her brother, a sophomore in high school, was dating a girl who went to the Columbus Vineyard. After being invited many times, he finally visited the church during a conference. He had an amazing experience and prayed to accept Christ that night. God radically changed him while his sister continually made fun of him.

In college, this young woman daily drank alcohol, smoked pot, and soon began taking and dealing harder drugs. She overdosed on speed, had alcohol poisoning several times, and finally dropped out. Through counseling she learned why she was self-destructive, but it didn't help her stop. She took large doses of psychiatric medications but continued using drugs and alcohol to cope with her problems.

The man she loved committed suicide and two months later she tried, too. Finally her counselor convinced her to try A.A where she experienced love in spite of being a total wreck. She relapsed quite a few times but finally went through a difficult withdrawal. However, even though she was clean and sober, she continued to feel a black hole of hopelessness inside of her. Her mental illness just escalated because now she wasn't high to numb the pain. Her depression deepened and she attempted suicide a second time and had a nervous breakdown. At the hospital, she was told she was completely psychotic and would have to take medicine for the rest of her life or she'd end up homeless.

She dabbled in New Age practices, but had incredible nightmares and would wake up feeling like there was evil all around her. She needed help to get away from these experiences, so she turned to the only person she knew who knew anything about spiritual things—her Christian brother. After eight years of him praying for her and

asking her to come to church, she agreed to go because she was so scared. In June of 1998, she visited the Columbus Vineyard although she was very skeptical and cynical. During worship, she was deeply touched and discovered that she had never known how good or loving Jesus really was. She sobbed in repentance and her whole worldview changed in a moment. God gave her a vision of herself walking into the brick walls of a maze bloodying her face over and over. Then she turned around and saw light at the end of the road where Jesus was standing and smiling with his arms outstretched, and she walked right into Him.

She fought with God all week but heard Him talk to her about her indecision and His plans for her life. The following Sunday, she went to church and prayed to receive Christ and gave her life over to Jesus. Someone prayed with her and she experienced the power of the Holy Spirit. She drove home that day yelling, "I'm saved! I'm saved!" but didn't realize just how good her life was going to get. She now says, "I wasn't just saved, I was rescued."

God gave her new relationships through the church and brought healing as people prayed with her. The Lord freed her from the experiences of evil in her apartment, from demonic strongholds in her life, and one night broke her addiction to alcohol and drugs when she confessed to loving them more than Jesus. Another amazing healing allowed her to go off her psychiatric drugs. She had been praying that God would help her get off the medications, and she had another profound vision. This time, Jesus was eating her pills one by one. Experts always advise not to stop cold turkey, but she responded in faith to the vision, stopped one dose at a time, and never had any side effects.

She entered our school for church leaders and planters, read her Bible and prayed everyday, went to church regularly, and grew like a weed. She prayed daily for God to break, mold, and send her. She helped with our ministry to the poor and homeless by weekly working at the food pantry, feeding the homeless, and visiting patients at a nursing home for the mentally ill. God sent her to minister to others whose circumstances were similar to those she had experienced.

God also began to heal her of deep emotional wounds through a special relationship in which she received a lot of healing prayer. Finally she was profoundly healed of her Dissociative Identity Disorder, which is commonly referred to as MPD (Multiple Personalities Disorder). God healed her of that in one morning's prayer session. Therapy had not healed her from it; medications did not make it go away. But God did what no one else could: all her own memories fit together in order and she could remember all of herself.

She describes God's transformation in her life this way: " My healings and deliverances [felt] so great, so miraculous, so huge, that I often have thought of [myself as] a lame person who was healed by Jesus.... I do not identify with the girl I used to be. I don't know who she is anymore. I feel so emotionally and mentally stable and mature now, I don't even recognize that person. That's because I am a

new creation. That's because Love came down on me... and that's what kind of difference God makes."

Pray together that God would teach each of you how to live in the light on a daily basis. Pray also against any fear of the enemy and against any confusion or disruptions from the kingdom of darkness.

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Paul probably wrote Ephesians following his letter to the Colossians, dating about A.D. 60-61, when he was in prison in Rome. Paul spent about two years in this city located in what is now modern Turkey. Ephesus was a thriving port city, on two major trade land routes, and home to the Temple of Artemis, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world (Borchert, p. 115). We know that witchcraft was prevalent in the city, since those who accepted Christ also repented of their involvement with evil and burned their sorcery scrolls (Acts 19:17-20).

STUDY THE PASSAGE: Ephesians 4:17-5:20

In the letter to the Ephesians, Paul spends most of the first three chapters reminding believers of the wonderful things God has done for those who trust Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. He talks to Jewish and non-Jewish Christians about how they both fit into God's eternal plan. He refers to the big picture of God's will: to reconcile or reunite all of creation with Himself. In other words, God is returning the fallen, damaged world to a state of harmony between Himself and His people. But this unity must also extend among all believers in Christ, and one day, this peace will be between God, believers, and a new cosmos. Chapters four through six focus on the lifestyle and actions that should characterize the people of God who are putting His will into practice, especially unity in the church, maturity in Christ-likeness, godly speech, sexual purity, and relationships at home and in the workplace. Paul begins this part of the letter contrasting two ways of life: the darkness of the non-Jew who has low morals and the new life and light of the followers of Christ. Paul says believers are called to "imitate" God in v. 5:1 and to "live as children of light" in v. 5:8. In this study, we will see that daily choices to rely on Jesus enable us to live godly lives, and how that union with Jesus helps us overcome temptations and the sinful patterns of our past.

1. Have someone read aloud Eph. 4:17–24; another 4:25–5:2; and someone else read 5:3–20. What does Paul exhort the new believers to stop doing (4:17)?

Paul wants the new Christians to stop living like the pagans around them. They have "come to know Christ" (v. 20) and should live "a life that is worthy of their calling" (4:1) as a follower of Jesus.

2. How does Paul describe “Gentiles” or those who disregard God’s moral standards (4:17-19)? What is missing in the way they think? What kind of actions does that lead to?

Their thinking is “futile” or pointless (Lincoln, p. 277), and dark or evil, because they are separated from God due to hardness of heart. Thus they have willfully rejected knowing God (Rom. 1:18-23) and become insensitive to the morality that God created within each human being (4:19; Rom 2:14-15). Consequently, they live in “riotous and excessive” ways, indulging in all kinds of sexual impurity and greed (Lincoln, p.279). Lincoln says that because they are not in a right relationship with God they are never satisfied and are insensitive to the way their lives impact others (p. 279). This gives a picture of a brash, unashamed, self-indulgent person who not only lives for pleasure but also endlessly craves more material things and thrills.

3. Why should Christians live a radically different life (4:20-21)?

As Paul contrasts pagan and Christian lifestyles, he literally begins with, “But” (Lincoln, p. 279). He reminds the believers that they now know Christ—not just some information about Him—but they have come “to know” Jesus in salvation. In the Bible, when God “knows” someone or vice versa, this implies having a relationship with that person. It can even be used to describe the physical intimacy of a husband and wife (Gen. 4:1, 25, *NASB*, pp. 5-6). Thus, our union relationship with Jesus should produce in us changes so that we increasingly resemble Him, the only human who lived in perfect intimacy with God the Creator/Father. Keeping our focus on Him and relying on His Spirit in us will move us from patterns of darkness/evil to attitudes and behaviors that are full of His light and truth (2 Cor. 3:17-18; Heb. 12:1-3).

4. What “truth” is Paul referring to in 4:21? When were they taught this (4:22)?

The “truth” refers to the gospel, the good news of Jesus’ death to atone for our sins and His resurrection to give us new life as Lord over death and life. Paul reminds them that they had heard this before—at least at their conversion and likely afterwards. He twice refers to their being taught about Christ (4:21, 22). Since we cannot know everything about Jesus and His ways after our conversion and baptism, we need ongoing teaching about how to live by faith (Gal. 3:2-5) while we are being conformed to His image (Rom. 8:29) and doing His works (Eph. 2:9-10). So it’s important to realize that the teaching is part of the present work of God in us so that His declaring that we are righteous (Rom. 4:23-25) becomes evident as our lives reflect His holiness and righteousness more and more.

5. Why does Paul use the image of changing clothes when describing people who have found life in Jesus (4:22-24)? What influenced the old self (4:22)?

As new creations in Jesus, we are leaving behind sinful patterns of living and adopting new, godly attitudes and behaviors. Paul expresses this process like taking off old, dirty garments and, after becoming new, putting on clean, fresh clothes. Some see this as a picture of removing clothes prior to baptism, being baptized as an outward sign of our new identity with Christ, and putting on His clean robes of righteousness. [Note, Jewish baptism symbolized cleansing of a Gentile coming into the Jewish faith and way of life. Christian baptism is more than just a cleansing from the past. Jews and non-Jews alike are stating that they not only die to their past, but that they are now alive to life in Jesus by faith in Him.] But Lincoln does not think the clothing metaphor should be limited to baptism. In leaving darkness and coming into the light, there are many changes taking place: from dead to alive; living separate from God to in union with Him; no longer dominated by sin and evil, but liberated to live under the rule and reign of Christ. Lincoln believes that the readers “are a new people who must become in practice what God has already made them, and that involves the resolve to put off the old way of life...” (pp. 285-286). The old self was influenced by deceitful desires, feelings, and cravings that were based on lies. Living without the truth of God, pagans are not able to discern what is true. Living under sin’s control, they are not free to live for anyone other than themselves. Even good works performed for someone else may be done out of pride, to diminish guilt, or to win favor from others.

6. Where does the ongoing transformation need to take place (4:23)?

Paul literally says “to be made new in the spirit of your minds” which may confuse us. He is not referring to the Holy Spirit living in us who needs to be renewed (!), but rather the inner person, especially the mind of the person (Lincoln, p. 287). Lincoln also points out that the verb tense indicates the renewal is an ongoing process, not a one-time event. And by using the passive voice [you are being acted on by someone or something else], Paul indicates that Christians need to put themselves under the teaching of the apostles and other leaders given by God to the church (Eph. 4:11) including Paul (Lincoln, p. 287). Of course we need to be studying the Scriptures and asking the Holy Spirit to cause God’s Word to take root and bear good fruit in our lives, too.

7. Who is the “new self” or “new creation” in us like (4:24)?

We were made in God’s image in Gen. 1:26-27. That’s been God’s intention all along—that humans would reflect aspects of His character. Sadly we lost much of our resemblance to the Father when our first parents doubted and disobeyed God (Gen. 3). This is especially evident when we doubt God, lie, mistreat others, and act selfishly. Now that Jesus has been born in each believer, our new self or the new life God is recreating in us is just like Him in

many ways. Jesus is called the exact representation or visible image of His Father (Heb. 1:3), so when we examine Jesus, we are looking at the Father. Note, we cannot be like God in every way, i.e., His omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, etc., or He would cease to be the Sovereign God.

*** What can we do so that our inner person becomes more like Jesus all the time?**

You may have already discussed some things in the last few questions. If so, you could use this for an **application** question at the end of your study time.

- a. Relying on Jesus and His Spirit within you to think, and live, and act like Jesus.
- b. Studying Scripture and praying that it would bear good fruit.
- c. Listening to the teachers/pastors in your local church and applying something from what you hear.
- d. Worshiping Jesus, the Father and the Spirit, since gazing on and adoring Him is when He often changes us (2 Cor. 3:18).
- e. Sharing struggles and praying with and for others in the body of Christ.
- f. Paul discusses other new habits for believers to adopt in the verses below. Note that for every negative behavior or vice, he advocates a godly one or virtue to replace it and gives motives for doing so (Bruce, p. 362).

8. What does Paul say Christians should be known for (4:25)? What is the consequence if we don't speak truthfully (4:13-15)?

Paul commands us to stop lying, in any form, and to speak the truth to each other. He is quoting from Zech. 8:16 where members of the Jewish community are supposed to be true to each other because of the covenant they share (Bruce, p. 360). This Paul applies to the members of God's new community, the church. He has already said that "speaking the truth in love" (4:15) meaning living truthfully, which will help us grow into mature believers who are joined to Christ.

Marlene Nathan puts it this way:

Paul characteristically gives us something to "put off" and something to "put on." We are to put off or put away all lying, deception and falsehood—these things should no longer be found in our speech as believers. In the place of falsehood, we are to speak the "truth in love," as Paul had directed us earlier in the chapter (4:15). Truth is essential, but love is indispensable. (In other words, we are not to insensitively and coldly express all that we "honestly" think—that is not "speaking the truth in love.") Love is the motivation, the reason we speak, and truth is to be the content. Because of our love for a Christian brother or sister, we may have to speak to them a "hard" but truthful word. We do this because we are actually members of one body...[and] allowing lies,

deception and falsehood into our interpersonal relationships will damage the body...[threatening] the precious unity that Christ died to achieve (1:9-10; 2:14-16; 4:3).

Truth and lies are the defining marks of the two kingdoms at war. God is a God of truth, and it is impossible for Him to lie (Heb.6:18). Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6). The Spirit is the Spirit of truth and His job is to lead us into all truth (John 16:13). To be in the Kingdom of God is to be brought out of darkness into the light—in other words, to live in the truth (Col.1:13; 1 John 1:5-6). Lies and deception, on the other hand, characterize the devil. According to Jesus, lying is just his natural dialect (John 8:44). He has been lying since the Garden. Paul even infers by using the Greek word *methodia* in 6:11 that the devil's "schemes" involve cunning and deception. By lying, we align ourselves with Satan's kingdom. By putting off falsehood and speaking the truth, we align ourselves with the Lord...(Nathan, pp. 8-9).

Without the truth, we could never see our need for a Savior and know how trustworthy He is. Without truth in human relationships, no one would know whom to trust, and families and churches would dissolve (4:25). We need the truth in order to learn what our blind spots or weaknesses are. When challenged with the truth about the greatness and goodness of God, we may be able to get rid of harmful lies that keep us from experiencing all God wants to give us. If a parent never spoke the truth to a child and let the child define reality, not only would that child's view be skewed but the individual would remain immature emotionally, never learning how to deal with the problems and stresses of life. Without truthful Biblical teaching, Christians could easily be led astray by deceitful teachers, creating more instability and crises than life already holds (Eph. 4:14). Because Jesus said He is the Truth, we need to be truthful people (John 14:6).

9. What topic does Paul address next (4:26-27)?

Besides lying, anger can greatly hinder human relationships (Lincoln, p. 313). So, Paul tells Christians to not let anger devolve into sin by remaining unresolved. He doesn't say or imply that Christians will never be angry. In fact, "in your anger..." assumes we will. His concern is that we handle our anger appropriately. Marlene Nathan writes:

"In your anger, do not sin" is taken from Psalm 4:4. Paul is first of all asserted that anger is permitted. There is such a thing as "righteous" anger. There is a place for anger simply because of the state of affairs: the world is fallen, all people are sinners and there exists real evil. God was provoked to anger often in the Old Testament (Ex. 22:24; Num.12:9; Deut.32:21; Josh.7:1; Jud.3:8; 2 Sam.6:7). Jesus got angry at things like injustice, hardness of heart and hypocrisy (Mark 3:5;

Matt.23). It is clearly NOT a sin to get angry. It is possible, however, for anger to cause us to sin—to say or do the wrong thing (pp. 9-10).

And, just like the pagan culture in the first century A.D., we hear many conflicting pieces of advice about what to do with our anger. Bruce says that putting a time limit on our anger helps prevent us from spiraling down into sin (p. 360). If we hold on to anger, it can become a bitter poison that hurts others (Heb. 12:15) and hinders our relationship with God (Mt. 5:22). Thus, Paul tells us to try to resolve the issue at the root of our anger so that we won't give the devil an inroad (4:27). Nathan explains:

The Greek word Paul uses for “foothold” is *topos* and it's commonly used for an inhabited space (see Lk.2: 7; 14:9; John 14:2-3). In the same way that Christ “dwells” in our hearts through faith (Eph.3: 17), the devil can be given room or space when we harbor unresolved anger. It gives him the chance or the opportunity ... to infiltrate and inhabit our beings. The devil loves to exploit any situation for his benefit, and when we have unresolved anger, that is a clear opening for him.

When Paul advises us to not let the sun go down while we are still angry, he is not being literal (e.g. we have more time to be angry in the summer months than in the winter months). There was the notion in the Old Testament that most matters needed to be resolved by the end of the day (Deut. 24: 13,15), which may be what Paul had in mind here. The point is, don't let your anger go—take care of it quickly, because anger can turn to resentment. Paul uses two different Greek words for anger in verse 26. One is *orge*, which is “anger” or “wrath,” and the other is *parorgismos*, which is a stronger form of *orge*.... It is anger degenerated into resentment. If we don't take care of anger quickly, it will degenerate into something worse, something the devil will capitalize on...(pp. 9-10).

Paul, however, is a realist. When there are two or more involved in a conflict, not everyone is prepared to forgive at the same time. Paul's advice to the Roman church states, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Rom. 12:18). Thus we can pray to live out forgiveness and turn the offense or offenders over to the Lord when others are not willing to resolve matters quickly.

Paul will also remind us in 4:32 to forgive each other just as Jesus did. Bruce sees forgiveness crucial to standing against the devil, citing Paul in 2 Cor. 2:10-11, “Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. What I have forgiven, if I have had anything to forgive, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, **to keep Satan from gaining the advantage over us**; for we are not ignorant of his designs” (p. 362). How many people have negative views on the church

and God because of unresolved disagreements from past experiences with Christians?

10. Why is work important for us all (4:28)? Why should we focus on doing good and not just avoiding sin?

Paul next writes about the importance of obeying one of God's Ten Commandments, to not steal (Ex. 20:15). Instead, he not only urges honest work but also gives a motivation for earning a living. The Christian is not living for himself or herself any longer. We have been bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, and we belong to Him (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Paul says that we are no longer slaves to sin, but now slaves of righteousness (Rom. 6:17-18). Consequently, we should consider how we might imitate Jesus' love and serve the needs of others. Paul views earning a living as the means for former thieves to do good, to share materially with others. Wouldn't that be a terrific witness for those who had been known to steal to now go beyond honest living and give generously to those less fortunate? Wouldn't that beautifully express God's whole law of love (Rom. 13:8-10)?

11. What does Paul say about our speech and related behavior (4:29-32)?

In imitating God who words brought creation into being, we ought to use the gift of speech to strengthen others, not to destroy them. Paul tells us not to permit any "rotten language" to cross our lips (Bruce, p.362). He says that our words should be fitting to the needs of the person and should be beneficial. Perhaps Paul had in mind Jesus' teaching that we will be held accountable for every thoughtless word (Matt. 12:36; Bruce, p. 363). That certainly means we need to choose our words carefully! Paul mentions several kinds of evil that we often express with harmful words (4:31) and later touches on impure speech (5:4). He reminds us that such unloving attitudes and words "grieve the Holy Spirit of God" who lives in us (4:30). Since Jesus lives in each Christian, we not only are grieving Him within when are unkind but also grieving Him when we damage the unity of the church (Bruce, pp. 363-364). So, we ought to get rid of bitterness and grudges, unrestrained anger, shouting and slander, as well as every type of ill will towards others. We also should examine ourselves for other kinds of speech that negatively impacts others: gossip, backbiting, complaining, and pessimism. Instead, Paul tells the Christians to "be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other... (4:32)" because we have been shown these by Jesus Himself.

***What do others hear coming from your mouth?**

12. Whom should others see living in us? Why is it important to "walk our talk"? What should motivate all these changes in behavior (4:32-5:2)?

Paul cites the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father as the primary reasons we should forgive others and adopt loving behaviors. In listing kindness, compassion, forgiveness, love, and self-sacrifice, Paul is mentioning some of Jesus' character traits and several fruit of His Holy Spirit (Gals. 5:22-23). Since we cannot express these apart from Jesus, Paul reminds us that we have received forgiveness from Jesus and thus can extend that towards others. In stating that we are God's dearly loved children, Paul encourages us to imitate our Heavenly Daddy. Most young children learn by imitating their parents or other role models, so this is a timeless principle. How is it possible for us to become like our heavenly Father who is perfect (Matt. 5:48)? Since children are born with some of the genes of their parents, and Christians are born again of God's Spirit (John 3:5; Tit. 3:5-6), we all have His nature living in us. Thus we have the Person and the power of God at work in us. How God causes His work to occur in us is a mystery, but we do know that we have a part to play in growing up to resemble Him (Phil. 2:12-13; 2 Pet. 1:3-8). Rather than mustering self to do the impossible, relying on Him by faith is the only way for us to live transformed lives.

Bruce points out that most of the people Paul was writing had not seen many Christian role models, nor even met Paul, so he could not call them to imitate his life as a pattern of discipleship. Instead, Paul uses God the Father and His Son as the examples for the new believers to copy, and Jesus' sacrificial love is highlighted here (pp. 367-368).

13. Why should God's people be free from lusting for sexual experiences or material things (5:3-4)?

Paul reminds his readers that they are called to be "God's holy people" (1:4, 5:3). Thus Paul draws the line even at obscene, coarse, or off-color speech, which would indicate impurity in a person's inner being (Matt. 12:34). Any form of lust or greed is idolatry, because we are treating something as more desirable or satisfying than God. Idolizing sexual activity can lead to becoming dependent on or addicted to it. This defiles a person, those involved in sexual sin with him or her, and causes us to sin against the Holy Spirit living within (1 Cor. 6:18-20). Paul says we should not only avoid this behavior, but we shouldn't even discuss it or make light of it (Bruce, p. 370). Of course, this does not mean we can't literally speak in private when warning a disciple or our children to avoid such traps, etc. We are just not to make it the topic of our routine conversations (Lincoln, p. 334).

14. What's an antidote for impure speech or speech that tears others down (5:4)?

Paul recommends we replace impurity, greed, and unclean speech with thanksgiving. Instead of selfishly lusting after or using people and the things God has made, expressing gratitude to God who has created and given these things shifts our focus off ourselves (Lincoln, p.333). It also causes us to

acknowledge that we are finite like the things we might lust after or indulge in, keeping us in a place of humility before Almighty God who alone should be worshiped.

***How could an attitude of thanksgiving help put an end to gossip and complaining?**

15. Why should we not conform to our culture (5:5-7)?

Paul strictly warns that those who engage in immorality or greed will not have a part in the kingdom of God but will face His wrath in judgment instead. Paul knew that sexual immorality, greed, and idolatry were rampant in the ancient world. He told the Corinthians that some of them were saved out of those practices. “And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11). Consequently, the believers both in Corinth and in the area of Ephesus should no longer live like that. Or, they would forfeit their part in God’s eternal kingdom (1 Cor. 6:9; Eph. 5:5). Paul goes on to say don’t let others deceive you by rationalizing sin, either. And, he states we should not participate in their lifestyles. Of course, God expects us to live among the unsaved (John 17:15-19) and to be the light of the world (Matt. 5:14-16), a testimony to the pure, true life found in Jesus. So, verse 7 does not excuse a defensive, separation mentality toward people still living apart from Christ.

Does this mean there’s no hope if believers fall into temptation and sin in these ways? No, the Scriptures are clear that “if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). However, to continue in sin, as if our actions did not matter because we were counting on God’s forgiveness, would be a mockery of Jesus’ painful suffering and death to secure our forgiveness. And to habitually sin is incompatible with those who have died and were raised to live a new life in Christ (Rom. 6:1-4). Because God has put His Spirit in all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, Christians should outwardly exhibit the obedience and fulfillment of God’s moral law since that is what the Spirit is compelling us to do from the inside (Jer. 31:33-34).

***What attitudes or behaviors are you prone to rationalize?**

16. While living in the world, what should guide our behavior and decisions (5:8-10, 17)?

Paul states, in several different ways, that living to please God should be our rule of thumb. Finding out what pleases Him, practicing what truth we have learned (4:21; Phil. 3:16); proving or demonstrating what His perfect will is (Rom. 12:2) all describe the actions of someone intent on pleasing God. Paul uses images of light and dark to contrast these two ways of life: living to

please God vs. living for self; fulfilling God's will vs. my own; doing good by faith in Christ vs. living in rebellion against Him (Bruce, p. 373).

***How do you usually determine what God's will is?**

17. Why should we avoid dwelling on evil when we live as light in the world (5:11-16)?

There is a biblical principle that what we gaze at, we become (2 Cor. 3:17-18). If we want to be full of light, our attention should be on the light (truth and purity) of Christ, and we should engage in imitating His loving actions. Our calling is to be united to Him and holy like Him, not inspectors of other's sin. Lincoln argues against believers exposing evil by confronting or rebuking others verbally. Instead, he thinks Paul meant that as we pursue holy living, the light of Christ will shine in the darkness of people's lives and bring an awareness of sin (p.330). The Holy Spirit will do the work of convicting others (John 16:8-11) and God will, in His timing, uncover everything that is hidden (Luke 12:2-3). Lincoln sees Paul urging the new Christians again to draw a line beyond which they will not join in the behavior of the world around them since they have died to that former way of life (Rom. 6:1-4) and now participate in the kingdom of light (Col. 1:12-14) (pp. 333-335).

18. What is our source for Jesus' life to grow in us and in our church (5:17-20)?

Paul goes on in to address how we should live in the time period between Christ's first and second comings. He tells us to live wisely, again to focus on what God's will is, and instead of indulging in alcohol and other cheap escapes, to be filled continually with the Holy Spirit. All the behavior that he encourages in the church, which will build each other up and honor God in the name of the Lord Jesus is dependent on the activity of the Holy Spirit. Paul does not limit the filling of the Spirit of God to a one-time encounter. He uses a verb tense that means continual action—"keep on being filled with the Spirit."

APPLYING THE TEXT

Note there are a number of application questions throughout the study you may want to use at this point instead of earlier in the discussion.

***Have others seen a measurable change in you since you first received Jesus by faith?**

***How would you explain to someone else the way to overcome ungodly thoughts or behavior patterns?**

***What's one thing you could ask Jesus to help you do this week to become more like Him?**

WRAPPING IT UP

Paul has more to say to the church about living the life worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He continues in chapter 5 and 6 to talk about the way Christians should relate to one another citing mutual submission in the church; love and respect between spouses; obedience and consideration between children and parents; and sincere service and justice between employees and employers. When we choose to live and love like Jesus, we are participating in His kingdom and reflecting His light to the world. As we cooperate with His Spirit's work of changing our thinking and behaving, we will increasingly resist and overcome the temptation to fall back into worldly ungodly patterns of living. We should not forget that Paul wrote these truths to the church body, not individuals. Our efforts to withstand the lure of darkness need to be fought together—as we jointly worship, study God's truth, forgive, and pray for one another.

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