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small group material



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Turning Lost Students into Christ-Centered Labourers

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" principle to be really helpful in my life. There are things in life and sexuality that are clearly right and things that are 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.

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.





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

1 Thessalonians 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 identity 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.

What Are the Questions?

Ephesians 5:3-14

LAUNCH

A Christian friend confides in you that she and her boyfriend have been having sex together. She loves him and doesn't believe it is wrong. How would you respond?

EXPLORE

Read 5:3-4

1. Take a careful look at each of the words Paul uses in the first list of three sins or consult a Bible dictionary. What do each of those terms mean?
2. What do these three terms have in common? With what in the context do they contrast?
3. Let's look at some other passages on sexual purity: I Corinthians 6:9-20; Galatians 5:19-23; Colossians 3:5-7; I Thessalonians 4:3-8; Hebrews 12:16. What similarities do you see?
4. Paul secondly confronts the habit of foolish talk and coarse joking. Why do you think he confronts this behavior? What is wrong with it?
5. Why do you think Paul emphasizes "giving thanks?"

Read 5:5-7

6. What does Paul want them to understand?
7. What connection does Paul make between character and eternal destiny? Is he saying sexual purity is a condition of salvation?

8. Of what deception is Paul warning the Ephesians? How might we be deceived about sex in our culture?

Read 5:8-12

9. How does Paul describe their old life? And how does he see them now?
10. On this basis, what is Paul's exhortation to them?
11. What is the fruit of "light"?

Read 5:13-14

12. This section provides some additional motivation for Christian obedience. What does v.14 imply about the transforming power of "light"?
13. Where does the light come from?
14. What will be the outcome of a life lived in the light as Paul describes?

APPLY

15. In light of this passage, what would make a Christian who is having sex outside of marriage want to stop?
16. What motivation does Paul give for turning away from these sins?
17. How would you counsel someone who is struggling with sexual purity?
18. Paul is realistic in this passage about the challenge of walking in the light. Where have you let "darkness" get a foothold in your life?

Note. Healthy believers find safe people to whom they can confess their sins and find forgiveness and encouragement. If this passage has raised issues that are a struggle for you, find a safe person to help you.

What Are the Answers?

1. "Immorality" refers to premarital sex; "impurity" to any other kind of sexual sin; "greed" refers to the sin of covetousness as in lustful craving.
2. Self-indulgence; It is contrasted with Christ's self-giving in v.2.
3. Allow the group to discuss.
4. Allow the group to discuss.
5. Gratitude is the antidote for greed.
6. Note the connection between v.3 and v.5. He is labeling sexual immorality as idolatry.
7. No immoral person has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ. No, he is saying that it's a consequence of salvation. We have a new attitude and want to obey because we have a new love – the Lord Jesus).
8. That obedience doesn't matter. See "What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?"
9. They were darkness but now are light in the Lord.
10. To live as children of light. See "What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?"
11. Goodness, righteousness, truth.
12. It exposes our idolatry and illuminates the radiance of Christ.
13. Christ. Look back at v. 8b, "you are light in the Lord."
14. A life of joy and peace. As we turn away from lustful behavior and flippant speech. Having been renewed in the spirit of our minds (4:23) our obedience becomes the natural outworking of our new identity in Christ.
15. Realizing that our former behavior is a form idolatry – the worship of pleasure or status or self and that we have a new love – Jesus, whose goodness and grace is much more worthy of our worship.
16. Sexual purity is proper for God's saints since in Christ we have a much more worthy object of our affection.
17. Replace their idolatry, whether it be pleasure, or something else, with a love relationship with Jesus Christ.
18. Allow the group to discuss.
19. Be aware of opportunities for further one-on-one follow up of the things discussed in this study.

Memorize

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.
Ephesians 5:8