

Glow In The Dark

Ephesians 5:6-14 November 8, 2023

Ephesians 5:6-14 - ⁶Let no one deceive you with empty arguments, for God's wrath is coming on the disobedient because of these things. ⁷Therefore, do not become their partners. ⁸For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light—⁹for the fruit of the light consists of all goodness, righteousness, and truth—¹⁰testing what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹Don't participate in the fruitless works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹²For it is shameful even to mention what is done by them in secret. ¹³Everything exposed by the light is made visible, ¹⁴for what makes everything visible is light. Therefore it is said: Get up, sleeper, and rise up from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.

Did you love glow-in-the-dark toys as a kid? It was always so exciting to unwrap the little plastic bug and hurry to the nearest closet and close the door to see it shine. Then came the let down.

Those toys glow because chemists mix phosphors in with the plastics, which absorb energy from one source and then emit it as glowing light.¹

The discovery of phosphorus itself was a happy accident all the way back in the 1660s. A German fellow named Hennig Brand was trying to create gold out of *urine*. He collected 1,500 gallons of it in his basement lab and started cooking. At the end of his experiments, there was no gold, but there was a glowing substance: phosphorus.²

Three hundred years later, in 1962, glow sticks were *also* developed accidentally. The chemist who stumbled upon the formulation had no idea glow sticks had become a *thing* in American culture. 50 years later, after being told his fluorescent goop had become a staple at events across the globe he responded, "Is that so? Maybe my granddaughter will think I'm cool now."³

You Christians have been made to glow in the dark. It wasn't an accident - this has been the plan all along. Before planet earth was spinning on its axis, God, the Creator of light, planned to illuminate the darkness. He did so with His word and He continues to do so with His children. He scatters us into time and place so we can *reflect* His light in this dark world.

Paul is deep into a description of the differences between the Christian life and the non-Christian life. In these verses, his focus is on how we light up the dark by walking with Jesus.

Ephesians 5:6 - ⁶Let no one deceive you with empty arguments, for God's wrath is coming on the disobedient because of these things.

¹ <https://laughingsquid.com/the-chemistry-of-how-glow-in-the-dark-toys-work/>

² <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2016/02/02/465188104/phosphorus-starts-with-pee-in-this-tale-of-scientific-serendipity>

³ <https://www.vice.com/en/article/4x8gjn/the-guy-who-invented-glow-sticks-had-no-idea-they-were-so-popular>

Paul is referencing the sins listed in verses 1 through 5. The lifestyle of ungodly sexual expression, greed, foul language, impurity, and idolatry - the ways of the Gentiles - the way of the world. Paul was very blunt in verse 5: "For know and recognize this: Every sexually immoral or impure or greedy person, who is an idolater, does not have an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ."

To live a life in these habits - to *practice* these things - reveals that a person is *not* a Christian. They do not have a place in the coming Kingdom. More than that, Paul reveals in verse 6 that God's wrath is coming to judge the nations and the people who practice these sins. There is a future judgment coming on the whole earth. These is also here-and-now judgment. It's not just coming someday, it comes *now*.⁴

If we want to glow in the dark, we have to have a proper understanding about what is right and what is wrong. Paul gives us these warnings: The Devil is going to try to trap you. False teachers are going to try to deceive you. The world system is going to lie to you and tell you that sin isn't really bad, it doesn't have consequences, it's going to gratify you and liberate you and benefit you.

But Paul says don't be deceived by the empty arguments - the "shallow words," devoid of substance and truth. These words encourage you to abandon the Lord's guidance and principles.⁵ They offer liberation but they deliver bondage.

We need to learn how to recognize spiritual propaganda, how to recognize false teaching, and recognize messages that may seem appealing but underneath are just that same lie from Satan which says, "Has God *really* said..."

Talk of wrath against the wicked might arouse a feeling in us of, "Yeah, they have it coming!" But Paul would have us remember the grace of God, the mercy of God, the compassion of God - that, no matter the sin, *such were some of us*, but the Lord reached out and saved us. We're here not to crush evildoers, but to rescue them. As we consider the sin in the world around us, it's always a good reminder that judgment begins in the house of God. Paul referenced judgment 80 times in his writing. 60 of those references are directed toward *Christians*.⁶

Ephesians 5:7 - ⁷Therefore, do not become their partners.

In chapter 3, Paul used this word "partner" when he said Gentiles had become *partners* in the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel. This whole section is about difference and choice. We can either participate with God or we can participate with the unbelieving world.

Your life, your activities, your words are part of a greater whole. John Donne wrote, "*No man is an island, no man lives alone.*" Through your words, actions, and relationships, you partner either in the family of God and His unfolding work, *or* you partner with the kingdom of darkness as a son or

⁴ *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 11: Ephesians Through Philemon*

⁵ Markus Barth *Ephesians 4-6: Introduction, Translation, And Commentary*

⁶ Klyne Snodgrass *Ephesians*

daughter of disobedience. One partnership leads to growth and life and glory. The other leads to corruption and waste and death.

If you habitually practice the way of the Gentiles, specifically the sins Paul listed in the previous section, *you cannot further the Gospel*, you cannot build up the Church, you cannot bear spiritual fruit, you cannot fulfill your life's purpose, you cannot delight God, you cannot grow in the likeness of Christ, you cannot be who you're supposed to be. Paul cannot be clearer. It can't happen.

When a person practices sin, their life becomes futile, their understanding becomes darkened, their heart becomes hard, and they will be excluded from the life of God.⁷

Verses 7 and 11 call us as Christians to *radical* non-conformity.⁸ Don't partner, don't participate. It doesn't mean we completely remove ourselves from interaction with unbelievers. That would be impossible. It means that we live, think, decide, and conduct ourselves in a totally different way.

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

It's not just that you were *in* the dark. You *were* darkness. Our hearts, depraved and dominated by sin, *generate* darkness in this world. This is why human society is the way it is. It doesn't matter the political arrangement. It doesn't matter the number of laws or the quality of the laws. It doesn't matter the level of wealth or poverty. In every society you will find theft, violence, hatred, corruption, because our fallen hearts *manufacture* the darkness. We need heart transformation more than societal rehabilitation.

But now, if you have been born again, you are no longer darkness, you are light *in the Lord*. That's an important clause. You *were* darkness, generating corruption and wickedness on your own. Now, as a Christian, you are light *as long as you abide in Christ*. Because *He* is the Light. *He* is the One Who brings fruit in your life and shines through you. We can't be light *unless* we abide in Christ.

Christ is the Great Alchemist. He can take waste and turn it into gold. Beauty from ashes. He can take a ruined human life and fill it with His glorious purpose, bringing death to life.

There's *no* starker difference than between dark and light. We were trapped, blind, hopeless. Then Jesus shined the Gospel into the dark. And we who believe have been rescued out of darkness and made children of light. A new identity. A new reality. New ability and perspective.

Since this is the case, *walk as children of light*. It's the fourth time Paul has talked about our walk. Walking means the way we live life - our thoughts and choices and actions. He said, walk worthy of your calling, do not walk as the Gentiles do, walk in love, and now walk as children of light.

⁷ Ephesians 4:17-18

⁸ Thomas Neufeld *Ephesians*

How do we do that? First, by reflecting the Light of the World. We reflect the character of God as we imitate Him. In 1 Thessalonians 5 and Romans 13 we're told that walking in the light means living with self-control, wearing the armor of faith, encouraging one another, not quarreling, being spiritually awake.

So, we might apply verse 8 this way: You are no longer what you were. The question is, *are you what you are?* God has done these great things. Are we *walking* in them? Are we glowing?

Ephesians 5:9 - ⁹for the fruit of the light consists of all goodness, righteousness, and truth—

The supernatural result of walking with Jesus is that spiritual fruit will grow in our lives. That's the work the Spirit does in us. But, if left to our own devices, we will slide back into the *natural* production of sin.

So, it's not that we make ourselves good or generate our own righteous light. That's impossible apart from the Lord. *He* will do it by His power. But *we* partner with Him and walk with Him.

Going back to our glow-in-the-dark analogy - those little toys don't shine unless they're exposed to light and then that light from the other source radiates from them. But when they are exposed to light, they can't help but glow in the dark. It is how they have been made to function.

The fruits Paul lists here - goodness, righteousness, and truth - they're all characteristics of God Himself. As we walk with God, orienting and calibrating our lives according to His truth and His will, His likeness shines through us, manifesting in Godly kindness, Godly generosity, Godly truth.

Ephesians 5:10 - ¹⁰testing what is pleasing to the Lord.

Testing means, "analyze, trying to learn," or, "examine," or, "discern," or, "find out by experience."⁹

A legalist comes along and says, "*I've identified all the things I shouldn't do and all the things I should do, and I do them and God is therefore obligated to be pleased with me.*"

The fact of the matter is, living life isn't as cut and dry as legalists want to pretend. There *are* things that are specific and definite, but much of our Christian lives will be spent figuring out what the Lord wants us to do in the situations we find ourselves in.

One resource says, "*The Bible gives general principles for life, but followers of Christ must use wisdom to discern how to apply those principles to the concrete issues of their lives.*"¹⁰ Elsewhere, Paul wrote, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling."

⁹ CDW, NASB Dictionary, Barth

¹⁰ *ESV Study Bible Notes*

How? Paul said in Romans 12: *“Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.”*

What an exciting thing to know that our lives can *please* God. We can bring Him delight. Living the Christian life is *not* about getting God’s rage off of us. He *loves* us and is interested in us. He loves to hear you sing and he loves to be with you and to use you and enrich your life with His grace.

Ephesians 5:11 - ¹¹ Don’t participate in the fruitless works of darkness, but instead expose them.

What does it mean expose the works of darkness? The term can mean rebuke or convict or refute. But remember the analogy we’re in: The world is dark, you were part of it, now you’re saved and, as a Christian, you reflect the light of God’s truth and righteousness and goodness. As you glow in the dark, Christ’s light exposes evil for what it is.

One version puts it this way: *“Let your life show by contrast how dreary and futile these things are.”¹¹*

How does this work, practically? There are at least three ways: Through words spoken in private, by public preaching against them, or simply by our conduct, which will contrast the fruitlessness of darkness with the fruitfulness of light.¹²

Our goal in exposing sin is *not* to harm the sinner. The goal is that the exposure therapy would convince them of what’s really going on - that they realize they’re stuck in rotten corruption and there’s an alternative. God shined a bright light on Saul of Tarsus, didn’t He? He did so in an effort to *rescue* him. And aren’t we glad the Lord did that?

We can expose fruitlessness by simply being people who bear fruit. If I’m fed up with the evil around me, if I’m enraged by the corruption of society, one of the best things I can do to combat it is simply to bear spiritual fruit, which will happen as I walk with God and obey His commands.

Ephesians 5:12 - ¹² For it is shameful even to mention what is done by them in secret.

Wait, are we supposed to expose the works of darkness or are we not even supposed to talk about them? Paul wants us to have a proper perspective on sin. It’s not a trifle. It’s not a joke. It’s not a small thing. It is shameful, terrible, rancid, and dangerous. Klyne Snodgrass writes, *“[Paul] wants to convey the seriousness of these sexual sins without discussing the details of the depravity.”¹³* We shouldn’t take sin lightly in our own lives or in our church or in our society. We should see it the way God sees in and respond accordingly.

¹¹ J.B. Phillips New Testament

¹² Barth

¹³ Snodgrass

Ephesians 5:13-14a - ¹³Everything exposed by the light is made visible, ¹⁴for what makes everything visible is light.

You've probably seen those terrible experiments where they shine a blacklight on a hotel bed. The light makes the grime visible and then some choices can be made.

So here we are, glowing the light of Jesus Christ, by preaching the truth, by lovingly but faithfully calling out sin in our society and especially in the church, *and* by simply bearing spiritual fruit. We glow, and as we glow, the fruitless grime of evil is exposed. And, when it's exposed, choices can be made. When sin is revealed in our lives, we can cleanse ourselves of it,¹⁴ and when unbelievers are exposed to the light, they often turn to Christ to be saved! Not always, but that's what happened to Paul, and to the Ephesians,¹⁵ and to you and I.

Ephesians 5:14b - Therefore it is said: Get up, sleeper, and rise up from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.

Scholars generally agree that this quote came from an ancient Christian hymn that would've been familiar to the church at Ephesus. There are some who make a case that Paul himself wrote it.¹⁶ I think that's pretty neat. We don't think of Paul as a songwriter, but there's evidence that songs are hidden in Ephesians chapter 1 and Colossians 1.¹⁷

The line of the song given come from Isaiah 26 and 60. We want our worship to be Scriptural - that's a really good way for our services to *glow* in the dark. God's Word is a lamp and a light, after all.

But, as we close considering this song, what does the Christian life offer to a person trapped and dying in the dark?¹⁸ Life where there was death. An awakening of the mind to truly understand for the first time. *Real* enlightenment. Most of all, the presence of God Himself in your life. "Christ will shine on you." How? Because He comes and is with you, personally. He draws you to Himself and pours into you His power and grace and goodness and then you start radiating it back out.

He's not some wizard behind the curtain. He is God with us. He's turned His face to us. He lets His face shine on us. His presence gives us power.

In Exodus 33, the Lord said to Moses, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." Moses answered, "If your presence does not go, don't make us go up from here...I and your people will be distinguished by this from all the other people on the face of the earth." And, after meeting with the Lord, what happened to Moses? He glowed! He was radiant. May God shine the light of His goodness through our lives as we walk with Him in this dark world.

¹⁴ 1 John 1:7-10

¹⁵ *EBC*

¹⁶ Jonathan Lunde and John Anthony Dunne *Paul's Creative And Contextual Use Of Isaiah In Ephesians 5:14*

¹⁷ *Holman Concise Bible Commentary*

¹⁸ Darrell Bock *Ephesians: An Introduction And Commentary*