

Jason Upchurch - Ephesians 5:7-14- No Partnership with Darkness

This morning we're getting close to the conclusion of the put-off, renew your mind, put on section of Ephesians. Paul is winding down this crucial understanding of the Christian life. Next week we'll see sort of a hodgepodge of issues we need to consider as believers.

But this morning we're looking at some of the practical conclusions of things we looked at last week in regard to immorality. We saw that we are to put off impurity, immorality, covetousness. Those are basically sexual sins. And we're also to put off sins related to those things that come out of our mouths: foolish talk, coarse jesting, filthiness which are often related to sexual immorality.

I think we can all agree these are hard sins to remove from our lives but nevertheless we're called to rid them from our lives.

But that brings up some more complicated issues that we have to deal with. And really the question is: how do we live as faithful Christians in a world that is saturated in immorality on every level? How can we possibly live our lives to the glory of God and stay free from sin when we're surrounded by people all the time who are sinful?

How do we balance that? And it's always been hard to balance.

On the one side there are those in the Christian community who want to retreat from all secular connection. We think of the Amish or Mennonites who form tight knit communities that don't really interact with the secular world around them at all. That has loosened up over time, of course. But they are much like the Anabaptists before them and the monks before them - basically cloistering themselves off from society.

And sometimes when you look around at society, can you really blame them?

There's an app called Boycot - and others like it - that allow you to take a picture of a barcode of a product. And the app will go investigate the company, all it's suppliers and all of the charitable giving of the supply chain and so you can make ethical decisions. Do you want to buy Christmas lights made from a factory in Cambodia that sources it's wiring from a factory in China, that purchases it's copper from a mine in the mountains where child labor is used?

Do you want to purchase a Soda that uses sugar from a Big Agra conglomerate that uses crops from GMO based resources?

You might never buy anything from anyone ever again.

On the other side are those whose lives are almost indistinguishable from the world because they partner with anyone and everyone in any endeavor, many of which are very sketchy and shady. They do worldly things, partner with secular institutions and see no conflict of interest at all.

How do we live? How do we conduct ourselves in this life?

There's a saying that Christians are to be in the world but not of the world.

That comes from Jesus in **John 17:16-17** where he is praying for us and says: "They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world...as you sent me into the world, so I send them into the world."

This is the paradox we live in. We are in the world. The sinful, deceitful, treacherous world. And yet, we are not to be conformed to the world. And that's hard. Jesus did it, so it's possible. His prayer is that we are like him. He is in the world, but not of the world. And we can do it too, by his grace.

We are to be like teflon frying pans. We can have the nastiest stuff thrown at us and put on us, but it doesn't stick to us. You cast iron people are crazy.

How do we do this? How do we live in the world but not of the world? Do we retreat? Do we compromise? The answer is no to both.

Paul actually gives us 5 principles, 5 commands actually that if we follow will keep us from error in this way. These commands will keep any hint of immorality out of our lives.

Big Picture: We can be pure when surrounded by impunity.

1) Do not partner with sexually immoral people. Now, I'm going to read the whole thing because I want you to see the context of these commands is related back to all the immorality Paul mentioned. But our actual first command is in **Vs. 7 Read 3-7**

So the first command that ensures there's no immorality in our lives at all is that we don't partner with people who are caught up in these sins. We don't partner with those whose lives are immoral, impure, covetous, filled with crude talk, joking and filthiness.

We just don't do it. The Bible says that bad company corrupts good morals.

What does it mean to partner? The word used here is a specific word. It's a rare word in the Greek. Summetochos literally meaning "to share in the possession of something."

You are joint owners in a venture. In legal terms you'd have a partnership, or you'd be "in common," it's where you have bound yourself to someone else in a common, binding interest. When it comes to marriage it's the legal coupling that happens between husband and wife.

In marriage if I buy a car or a house or property, the default position is that if I die it all goes to her. Why? Because legally we are legally one together. Partakers. She has all the same benefits that I do by virtue of marriage.

The word is so specific and rare it's only used only 1 other time in the NT: in Ephesians. **Chapter 3:6**. Look at that. **Read**

There it is: partakers. Notice how the word is used. In the gospel the Gentiles become summethochos through faith in Christ Jesus. We equal partners in every way with Jews who believe in Jesus. We're not second class citizens in the Kingdom. We're fully equals in Christ. That's the grand mystery of the gospel that God had hidden for generations. That through faith in Jesus, God has given us equal share in the Kingdom. It's amazing.

So we can partner fully with any believer in any endeavor - we have the liberty to do that. We are joint heirs with them and with Christ.

But when it comes to unbelievers we are forbidden from having that connection. Do not become partakers - do not share in possession with an unbeliever. Why? **Read 5:8**

Because we were darkness and now we're light. Not just that we dabbled in darkness and did a little darkness. Paul says we were darkness. That was the substance of our lives. It was defined by darkness.

And that same reality is still true of unbelievers. They are darkness. Even the nice ones. Even the ones who are very business savvy, the ones who are kind and gracious and generous. They are darkness. **Turn to 2 Cor. 6:14-18**

You've probably heard this passage many times. It's the unequally yoked passage. And it's usually used when it comes to marriage. Believers cannot marry unbelievers. And that's true, and that is one of the principles in this passage. But it's so much more than just that. It's much more comprehensive than that. It includes every area of life. **Read 14-18**

Where does that phrase “unequally yoked” even come from? Well, in the OT there were laws that prohibited the Israelites from farming their fields with unequally yoked animals - two animals that weren’t the same. You couldn’t plow a field with an ox and a donkey, for instance. Why? Because the burden will never work. It’s not shared equally. One of the animals will always get worn out, they will never fully share the burden.

What Paul is saying is that the Israelites knew that that principle wasn’t primarily about animals. It was primarily about people. Do not willingly yoke yourself to an unbeliever. Why? Because when you yoke yourself to an unbeliever you’ll never carry the same load. A yoke is a huge piece of wood around the necks of the animals where you’re locked in together. When you’re locked in to an unbeliever you’re stuck. Stuck not doing the same load, stuck always being off kilter, never able to plow in the same manner.

When a believer yokes himself to an unbeliever in business or marriage or a partnership of some kind there’s always a misalignment. There’s always problems.

Notice he gives a bunch of rhetorical questions. **Read 14-16**

The answer to all of these is “nothing.” God now dwells in us and so we are to touch no unclean thing. We’re not to bind ourselves to anyone or anything that is sinful.

What does this mean in practical terms?

You are not business partners with any unbeliever.

You are not to marry an unbeliever.

You are not to purchase property or items with an unbeliever.

Can you buy groceries at a store that’s owned by an unbeliever? Sure. That’s okay.

Can you employ unbelievers. Sure. Can you work for unbelievers? Sure.

Can you play basketball together or borrow a tool? Sure. You’re not binding partners.

If the relationship is staggered, that’s fine. Just know the stagger. But you can’t partner. You can’t imagine that you’re equals when you’re not.

Years ago a family member suggested building houses together. He had the money, I had the time and motivation. It was in the aftermath of 2008 financial meltdown so land and flips were an absolute bargain and we could have made a pretty penny. One problem: he wasn’t a believer. I like him, he’s nice, we have fun together, he’s not steeped in any huge immorality. But there’s no summetochos. No partnership.

Fast forward a decade and a half and come to find out there are some massive worldview differences between us. Still friends, still appreciate him. Dodged a massive bullet.

Don’t own property with unbelievers, own businesses, or any legal entanglements. No fellowship, no partnerships.

Because what Paul says back in **Eph 5** is that we’ve been transformed. You can’t couple darkness with light. You can’t couple someone who is steeped in sin, a slave to sin and someone who is a new creation. That can’t happen. It is destined for failure.

If that’s you, you’re in that, you need to get out. The only exception is that if you’re already married to an unbeliever you need to honor your vows. But any other situation you don’t go into.

So don’t become partners with unbelievers.

2) Walk as Children of Light. **Read 8-9**

So our whole lives need to be walked out in light. What does that mean? Every aspect of what we do needs to be pure. That’s what light is. It’s pure, undefiled.

Everything about our lives is to be brilliant, bright, pure, warm light.

1 John 1:5-6: God is light and in him is no darkness at all, John says. Then he says that if we say we have fellowship with him but walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

Phil 2:15: we are to shine as lights in the world.

Matt. 5:16 Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

The Bible often speaks in binaries. You're either wheat or chaff. You're either for Christ or against him. You're either a son of God or a Son of Satan. You're either light or your darkness.

Darkness, biblically speaking, is all that is sinful, deceitful, and wrong. Why? Because bad things happen in the darkness. People get drunk in the darkness. People plot and scheme in the darkness. People commit sexual sin in the darkness. Darkness provides a cover for sinful action.

It's camouflage for sin. Notice he'll extend the analogy here. **Read 11-14**

So we are to walk as light. We're to walk in purity. Practically speaking what this means is that our lives characterized by obedience to the Lord. That's what it means to walk in light. Is every aspect of our life walking in obedience?

That means we need to know what the Lord wants and be growing in that.

Deut. 5:32: You shall be careful therefore to do as the Lord your God has commanded you. You shall not turn aside from the right hand or the left.

It's not just obeying the commands of God, it's being careful to obey them.

In John Bunyan's book Pilgrim's Progress there's a section where Christian is walking along the straight and narrow path. Remember the book is an allegory of the Christian life and the main character is Christian. And Christian comes to a house that is guarded by 2 lions. One on the right and one on the left. And so Christian doesn't want to approach the house for safety because the lions will tear him apart.

But the man at the house tells him the lions are chained. Christian is still afraid. The man says, the lions are chained and if you walk in the very middle of the narrow path you will not be harmed.

I love that. Jesus calls us to the narrow path. It's narrow because Christian morality is very clearly defined. There's not a lot of wiggle room. We don't turn to the right or left. And Bunyan's point with Christian is that believers are not called to stay near the edge of the path of obedience. We don't stray off once in a while. We are to stay in the exact middle of the path of obedience. To be very careful to stay there, as if lions could devour us if we stray off.

So we walk in the light. Notice he also gives us a reason for that. **Read 8b-9**

The reason that we walk in the light is because we want the good fruit that comes as a result.

We should want to walk in purity simply because that's what Jesus says to do. Amen and amen. But also we should walk in purity because we want the fruit that comes from that. We want the effects of that in our life.

When we do things that are underhanded, things that are shady, sinful, all in the name of the ends justifying the means, the ultimate fruit of that is not going to be good and right and true. It can't be.

You can't get good things from sinful actions.

You can't get righteousness from unrighteousness.
You can't get truth from lies.

Prov. 10:2: Treasure gained by wickedness does not profit.

Prov. 10:9: Whoever walks in integrity walks securely.

You never have to worry about what's to come if you're walking in integrity.

I know we know this, but sometimes you have to say it: In the Christian life you can't use sinful means to achieve righteous ends. You just can't. Maybe it seems to work in the short run. Maybe things seem fine, maybe no one finds out what you've done or the side effects are minimal.

But you know who knows? God knows. And you know what almost always happens? Other people know. Other people find out.

I was reading Proverbs 9 this week and it's talking about woman folly. And she says "Stolen water is sweet, bread eaten in secret (stolen) is pleasant.

Wisdom says the opposite. Wisdom says work hard, be honest even to our hurt. Listen to this "Riches and honor are with me, enduring wealth and righteousness...my fruit is better than gold, even fine gold and my yield better than choice silver." **Prov 8:18-19**

A lot of times we cut corners, or skirt morality because of financial reasons. We think we'll save some money, earn a little more. But we've just sold our integrity. Wisdom says there's something that's actually greater than gold and silver. You know what it is? Honor.

Living in an honorable way that pleases the Lord Jesus no matter if it costs us something. And it probably will.

Listen, if you want true God-honoring fruit in your life: stuff that is truly good and right and true, you have to walk in the light.

So we don't partner with darkness, we walk in the light.

3) We try to discern what is pleasing. Read 10

Sometimes what we should do or not do is not all that clear. We know we don't partner with unbelievers. That's clear. We know we walk in the light. That's clear.

But other choices in life we don't always know.

Do we take this job or that one? Do we make this financial decision or that one? Do I use this curriculum or that one. Do I spend time with this person or that one? How do I spend my time wisely?

Life is hard and filled with a lot of decisions that aren't obviously right or wrong.

The word Paul uses here for try to discern is a word that means to examine carefully. To test something thoroughly to ensure that it's really the right thing.

This is what jewelers do with diamonds to determine if they're real or fake. You have to look at certain characteristics. I mean, most of us if we were just handed a 10 stones that looked like diamonds would have no idea which was the good thing and which were the fakes. We'd need to know what to look for and examine carefully.

There are a lot of situations in life that we just jump into without carefully examining if we should be doing them. We rush into them, or we just want to follow the passions of our heart. It's not always even a sin issue. Sometimes these are just issues of wisdom.

I've bought cars that were probably not the wisest thing for me to buy. Sin? No. Foolish? Yeah.

I've spent time doing things or with people that probably wasn't the wisest thing for me to do. Sin? No. But I wasn't actively trying to discern what the will of the Lord was in that moment.

Sometimes in the angst of the situation it's helpful just to back up, take a breath and figure out what the big picture is. "Is this going to help my walk with the Lord?" "Is this going to help my family and friends to thrive in the short term or long term?" Is it necessary? Are there better things? If I asked a godly friend or pastor what they would do is it probably different than what I want to do? What's my spouse think?

These aren't fun questions. But this is how we discern the will of the Lord.

We're called to test things thoroughly. If there's something in your life that you're not sure about, you need to test it thoroughly. You need to know that you know it's a good thing.

Get godly advice, ask a lot of questions, ask what the worst thing is. Make sure you're not attaching yourself to people you shouldn't. Make sure that what you do decide you can confidently stand before the Lord and know he'd be pleased. **Read 10**

Not just that the Lord would be indifferent. But that he would be pleased by the decision you make. Would it make Jesus smile to know you're doing this thing?

4) Expose darkness. Read 11-14

So we've already seen that we don't partner with darkness. But we certainly don't do it ourselves. Don't be caught up in sin.

But we're to go one step farther: we expose darkness. We expose that there's sinfulness going on. Sometimes ignoring a problem is just as bad as partnering in the problem. Sometimes ignoring sin is just as bad as partnering with it.

It's hard to confront sin. Not only in ourselves, but in other people as well. Sometimes it's easier to turn a blind eye, to let it go, to ignore because we just don't want to deal with it.

Paul says that's not an option for Christians. We are called to expose. The word that's used here for expose is basically to drag it out into the light.

I've always had pretty good up close vision. I've never needed cheater glasses in the past, and by God's grace I still don't. But I am noticing those really small letters on things seem to get fuzzier. I have to hold things out farther, I need more light. I've even used the trick of taking a picture of something with my phone and then zooming in on the picture.

What I am doing? I'm trying to scrutinize something, expose it to light so I can see it clearly for what it really is. We have to do that.

We have to expose things for what they really really are. And this is especially true in our day and age when darkness is right in front of us lying to us about what's really going.

I was watching Senate testimony of a doctor this last week who is gender affirming. She wanted to be compassionate and sensitive to boys who are confused. And Senator Josh Hawley asked her a simple question: can a man get pregnant? She couldn't answer the question. He asked her 10 times: can a man get pregnant. She couldn't give a clear answer.

You know what he was doing? Exposing the darkness. Bringing her darkness out in the light. How can a doctor not know if a man can get pregnant?

That's an obvious situation. But we need to do that with our own sin. We need to drag it out into the light. And we need to drag the sin of those who want to partner with us into the light.

Sin is like mold, the only way it'll truly die is through light. Exposed to truth and reality and the law of God.

5) Stay vigilant. **Read 13-14**

Paul quotes an ancient early church hymn here. And the gist is that we need to stay vigilant as Christians. We can't just assume everything is okay. We always have to be awake and alert for situations where we might compromise.

You remember when Joshua came into the Promised Land there was a group of people - the Gibeonites - who said they had come from far away? They had fresh bread when they left and their water was full. But now the bread was moldy and the water empty. We're from far away, make a treaty with us!

Joshua and all the leaders: Oh, of course, you must be from far away - sure we'll make a treaty. Wrong. Turns out they were from just down the road. Joshua wasn't vigilant and so he made a vow to Canaanites who he was supposed to destroy.

The same thing can happen to us as well, if we're not vigilant at all times - if we're drowsy spiritually - we can end up in situations we should be in.

This is the nuance of wisdom in the Christian life. Being in the world, but not of the world.

Not partnering with darkness, not doing their deeds, but exposing them. And living in a way that pleases the Lord Jesus to the glory of God.

Pray