

Walk as Children of Light

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, everybody. Let me add my welcome to Andrew. My name is Vijay. I'm one of the pastors. Thanks to Team Nichols for doing that reading for us. As I was studying the passage today, I was reminded of what happened to Israel in the book of Numbers. You see, Israel were walking towards the promised land and they came to the edge of Moab. But Balak, the king of the Moabites, he was afraid that Israel would do to Moab what they did to Pharaoh and Egypt before.

And so Balak got a pagan priest called Balaam and he said, right, I want you to curse these Israelites, otherwise they'll march right over the top of us. And so Balaam and his talking donkey, they tried to curse Israel three times, but then famously out of his mouth instead came three lots of blessings. And when dark spiritual power didn't work, neither did military force, garden variety, sexual sin worked a treat as Israel intermarried with the Moabites and went after their foreign gods and walked away from the Lord. You see, Israel didn't heed the warning from Leviticus, which Graham read for us, not to adopt the detestable practices of the nations around them.

Otherwise, God would cut them off, vomit them out from his nation. It seems of all the things to stop people walking with God, garden variety, sexual sin works a treat. And for the past few weeks in Ephesians, the passages are Paul's guide to walking the Christian life. You can see on the screen there, here are some of the verses, just a range of verses from the past few weeks.

I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of your calling. You must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, walk in love. They're Paul's warnings for the church as we walk together. And this week is no different.

Verse 8, it says, walk as children of light. Verse 15, be very careful then how you walk. Today's warnings are the strongest because today's passage is a warning against sexual immorality.

[2 : 3 1] Of all the temptations we'll face on the road, garden variety, sexual sin is one that will really send us over the cliff. You can tell that is true by Paul's tone. Verse 3, there must not even be a hint of sexual immorality. Verse 7, do not partner with them. Verse 11, have nothing to do with. Verse 12, it is shameful even to mention what they do in secret. The language is a loud siren. It's flashing yellow lights. Paul is desperate that the Ephesians don't repeat the mistake of that generation of Israel who didn't finish the journey but fell in the wilderness. And perhaps for your stage of life, sexual temptation isn't an issue anymore. The passage also talks about impurity, greed, and idolatry. Please think of these things in a general sense if that's more appropriate to you.

The idea is to picture the one sin that would stop you walking with the Lord. But I think today Paul is speaking about them as they relate to sexual immorality and so that's how we're going to use them today. So pick up your Bibles, we're at verse 3. Chapter 5, verse 3, but among you there must not even be a hint of sexual immorality or of any kind of impurity or of greed because these are improper for God's holy people. And if we were to ask a room of Melbournians what is immoral when it comes to sex, there'd be lots of boundaries in all different places.

Even a room full of Christians would get lots of different answers. But given that God invented sex and he knows how it works best, let's give God a seat at the table too. On the screen you'll see Genesis 2. This is where God invented sex. It says, the man said, this is now bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, she shall be called woman for she was taken from man. On the screen, that is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife and they become one flesh. Adam and his wife were both naked and they felt no shame. And so man and woman, they leave their parents and are united to one another. That is a marriage. And they become one flesh. Their union is sealed with sex. And notice God's moral approval. It said, they were naked and felt no shame. Therefore, sex is only moral when it occurs within the marriage of a man and a woman. This is the only setting where the fullest expression of one flesh is possible. This Genesis passage is quoted by Old Testament law, by Jesus and by Paul.

It is the singular standard of sexual morality in the Bible. And that means sex before marriage, adultery, polygamy, same-sex activity. They're not part of God's good design. Jesus says that if we even look at another person lustfully, we've already committed adultery with them in our hearts. And so that includes pornography and masturbation, leering at someone with desire, thinking about someone, any thought, word or action that stimulates a person outside of the boundaries of a marriage between one man and one woman. Paul says, verse 3, there must not even be a hint of sexual immorality.

And if that is the standard, if Jesus begins at the eye and heart level, then we're all disobedient, aren't we? Lots of us will have painful pasts when it comes to sex and relationships. Almost all adults will be carrying some sort of shame by either the damage we've done to others or the damage that someone has done to us. Ephesians reminds us that we were dead in our transgressions and sins.

[6 : 53] At that one time, we all used to gratify the cravings of our flesh. But Ephesians also says that we were made alive by God's mercy and his love. That in Christ, we've been redeemed by his blood.

And then therefore, that chastens this conversation against self-righteousness. It reminds us that we're all failures in the same position, all saved by God's grace. Verse 3, it also talks about greed, which in general terms means coveting, like coveting your neighbor's possessions. But it also includes coveting your neighbor's wife, which is sexual temptation. Greed here is an insatiable indulgence at the expense of others. This is improper, Paul says, for God's holy people.

It's improper for the police to commit crimes, improper for politicians to abuse power. It's improper, proper for God's holy people to indulge in sexual immorality. It's the same idea in verse 4 as well. Nor should there be any obscenity, foolish talk, or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. You see, if sex is a gift for husbands and wives to enjoy, attaching obscenity perverts what God has made. I think the same thing goes for foolish talk. But coarse joking is very tough because it correctly translates as witty humor. And witty humor, dry banter, it's all about how close you can get to the line without being directly smutty or dirty. It's the clever double entendre.

It's the witty innuendo that gets right to the boundary without naming the actual objects, without actually being overtly inappropriate. And I love clever humor. I love dry comedy. But Paul says, not even a hint where sex is concerned. This joking is out of place. And I wonder, therefore, what that does to our sense of humor, to the movies we watch, to the TV shows we consume. Perhaps none of them are sexual in nature, but are they using sex, verse 3, or speaking about sex, verse 4, in a worldly way? Or with thanksgiving, verse 4, for the good gift that God has made? Heather Reed, who is our former vicar's wife, Andrew Reed's wife, many of you know Heather Reed. She said, I heard her say this recently. She said, Christians need to reclaim sex from our culture. We need to reclaim sex from something that is seen to be obscene or filthy or selfish to the good gift God has made. She said,

I want my kids to first learn about sex and hear about sex from me as a good thing, rather than something in the schoolyard that is filthy or smutty or dirty. I can totally understand why Christian parents homeschool their children. I can totally understand why Christian colleges are fully booked and kids can't get in. Dirty, smutty sex, obscenity is everywhere out there. It's easy to see how this passage encourages us to have some separation from the world. These are the verses I would use.

[10 : 44] To say why a Christian cannot date a non-Christian or marry them. We're walking into totally different directions. Obviously, if you're already married, then you're already one flesh, so stay together.

But even then, the Christian walk is hard enough if you're walking into totally different journeys. And so please pray for Christians here in our church family who are married to non-Christians.

Pray that they would remain faithful to God. Pray for their children to be faithful as well, while mum and dad are divided. And let's pray that spouses would be saved, so that they can walk together on the same journey. Pray also that we'd be brave enough to speak the truth in love, and warn Christians not to be in a sinful relationship. These are the verses I would use to say why a Christian can't date a non-Christian. But I think this passage is a warning for us to separate from other Christians. See, for the past few weeks in Ephesians, the passages are all about church building. The singular ministry of all Christians is to build the church. But if you want to break it down, just do what Israel did, and adopt the detestable practices of the culture around them, and use that in the camp. The danger is that Christians adopt the sexual standards of the culture around us as our boundaries in here. And so what was an R-rated movie 20 years ago is now just an M15 plus. And so if everyone out there is fine with that, I guess that's our standard too. Everyone out there sleeps together and moves in before they're married, and they're only consenting adults. And so if that's the standard out there, then I guess that's okay for us as well. Pornography doesn't appear to hurt anyone else. And so we can tolerate that in here, because that is the standard out there.

You see, it's appropriate to separate ourselves from the world, but I think the real danger comes from other Christians who say, yes, you can walk that puritanical way, but there are other ways of walking. We watch all sorts of movies and TV, and look, we're still Christians. Yes, you can be an over-the-top Christian and not have sex before you're married, but there are other ways of walking.

You see, sexual sin is hard enough, but when another Christian tolerates it, it's like a ticking time bomb in a church that will explode and break down all the building up church ministry. Paul says that that Christian is, verse 5, an idolater, because they serve impure and greedy desires rather than God.

[13 : 54] And so they walk like unbelievers. And as such, verse 5, they no longer have any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God, which is like saying they're no longer heirs and out of the family, just like that generation of Israel. To the Christian who tells us, stop being so judgmental, or there are no consequences. Paul says, verse 6, let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things, God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. There is a judgment coming. There are consequences for disobedience. You see, there are two different journeys, serving two different masters along the way, ending in two very different locations. And because we've all been disobedient when it comes to sex, many of us will worry whether we're still in the family. But I think this is speaking about a settled, deliberate, walking away from God. This is not about the Christian who sins and then repents, and sins, and then repents, and sins, and then repents, over and over again. That is poor repentance, to be sure.

But poor repentance is part of the Christian life. By the Spirit, God convicts us to keep repenting, and he renews our minds, and strengthens us to have some victories in the battle. We should sin less, but we won't be sinless. The danger here is not poor repentance, but unrepentance. It's for the Christian whose mind is a settled, deliberate, walking away from the Lord. It's for the Christian who lives like there are no consequences and no judgments coming. They are no longer battling hard, and struggling with poor repentance, but each day they are unrepentant, as they walk away from God's standard of sexual purity. As each day they continue to walk in an ungodly relationship that they refuse to end. Verse 7, therefore do not be partners with them. It's not don't be friends with them, but don't partner in their journey. You're not heading in the same direction. Imagine the danger of Christians tolerating sexual sin and leading other Christians astray. Don't partner with a version of Christianity that says it's okay to walk another way. Those Christians are not just a danger to themselves, but a danger to the rest of the church. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul warns a church who adopted the sexual standard of the culture around them. The Corinthians, he says 1 Corinthians 5, your boasting is not good. Did you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough?

And we have seen, haven't we, the damage that leaven does to the rest of the church. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, it uncovered sins that the church tolerated for years and years. You see, at the time the church knew that if it was uncovered, it would destroy the church and so it swept them under the rug. There is a podcast documentary called The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill. It's about a pastor called Mark Driscoll who started a very famous church, very popular church in the 90s. Recently though, Pastor Mark was stood down for his anger and his bullying, but already in 2021, already he's back leading another church. You see, people can get past anger and bullying, but not if he committed sexual misconduct. It seems to be the sin that pastors and churches never recover from. Closer to home, there is talk of a breakaway Anglican church.

After the Anglican tribunal tolerated a form of sexual immorality in the diocese of Wangaratta. Wangaratta dioceses are not just a danger to themselves, but a danger to the rest of the Anglican denomination. If sexual immorality is tolerated in a little pocket over there, it leavens the whole batch, even us over here. And even more closely to home, perhaps over the years, you have seen the damage that sexual sin has done to Christians and to the wider church.

I've seen many Christians who've dated non-Christians, who've led others astray. I've seen Christians who married non-Christians and are now walking the way with their partner and have walked away from the Lord. These passages are very tough. And if you're anything like me, your conscience has been pricked by the Holy Spirit in many places. Please speak to your congregational pastor if you need to have a chat about something. If you'd like to pray over some issues, if you need help, we'd love to help you walk with the Lord. Jesus says, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter. Anyone who repents will be forgiven, regardless of how poor their repentance. These warnings are very tough regardless, aren't they? And so let's finish with something more positive. Look at verse 8. For you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

[19 : 55] Live as children of light, for the fruit of light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth. And find out what pleases the Lord. Last week it was putting off old t-shirts and putting on the lifestyle that fits us now. This week it's the same. It's you are light, and so walk as children of light. It's not that we make ourselves brighter, it's that the gospel that we heard, the gospel switches the lights on inside us and makes us light. And so when it comes to sexual purity, be as visibly different as God's Word has taught you to be. You see, if apple trees produce apples and orange trees produce oranges, then dark minds produce dark deeds. And children of light produce, verse 9, righteousness and goodness and live according to truth, just like our Father. Be children of light.

Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything that is exposed by the light becomes visible. The idea is pretty basic here. It's that a godly lifestyle exposes dark deeds even before we've opened our mouths. Sure, it's a good thing to call out evil, but a distinct lifestyle shines a light so dark deeds can be seen for what they are. Because verse 13, everything exposed by the light becomes visible. Our bright lifestyles are so visibly different, they expose the dark deeds around them.

The other night, I think it was on Tuesday, I took my kids on a bushwalk. It wasn't too great. It was just around the church grounds here. And my son spotted these dark shadows flying overhead. And when he shone his torch on them, we realised that they went from being dark shadows to fruit bats with orange fur, brown fur. We could see them very clearly. And so, is our lifestyle bright enough to be visibly different from the culture around us? Or is there too much darkness within?

Years ago, I was really frustrated that I wasn't converting any of my friends. And a friend challenged me. She said, why would your mates want to become Christians when you look just the same as they do?

You are no longer darkness, says Paul. You are light in the Lord. And so, walk as children of light. But verse 13 goes one step further. Because it says, everything that is illuminated becomes light.

[23 : 06] You see, when our godly example shines on our friends, they're able to see the nature of their sin for what it is. And some of them will abandon their dark ways and become light. Verse 14, it's a picture of Jesus, the light of the Lord, waking up dead people the way morning light wakes up sleeping people.

And then, verse 8, can become true of our friends. They were once darkness, but now they are light in the Lord. And as they start walking in light, their example shines light on their friends. And so, their friends will now see their deeds for what they are. And then, they will be woken up from the dead.

And then, verse 8 will become true of them. And so on and so forth. You see how that works? Our light in the Lord shines an example on people around us. They can see their dark deeds for what they are. And some of them will move into the light as the light of Christ wakes them up from the dead.

And then, they do that for other people. So on and so forth. It's a sort of loop from verse 8 to verse 14. Backwards and forwards. Backwards and forwards. You see, Jesus' light, it not only wakes up dead people, it continually exposes the deeds around them. It's a wonderfully positive reason to walk as children of light.

After all, that's what happened to us, didn't it? When Jesus woke us up from the dead, as the godly example of Christians we knew shone brightly around us. And as the gospel they told us switched the lights on inside us. You see, we were once darkness, but now we are light in the Lord.

[24 : 56] And so, walk as children of light. And again, Paul's tone is so emphatic. Because of all the things that would plunge us back into darkness, sexual immorality works a treat. It's what happened to a generation in Israel. And it's why Paul is so strong today. He says, not even a hint of sexual immorality, nor of any kind of impurity. It's improper for God's holy people. He says, have nothing to do with fruitless deeds of darkness. It's shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret.

Jesus says, all sins will be forgiven, the children of men and whatever blasphemies they utter. In fact, that is what saved us in the first place. But a Christian who is unrepentant about sexual immorality, who adopts the standards of the culture around them, is no longer walking with the Lord.

They are walking off a cliff. And they're endangering the rest of us too. Verse 15, Paul says, be very careful then how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise.

There's lots more to say. As I said, please speak to your pastors if you need help, if you'd like a chat, if you'd like to pray. We're going to pray now.

Father God, please forgive us for our sexual sin, for our hypocrisy. Father, please forgive our poor repentance. By your Holy Spirit, strengthen us to walk as children of light. We pray for church family who are married to non-Christians, that they would remain faithful to you.

[26 : 51] We pray for their kids to remain faithful while mum and dad are divided. And please, Father, would you save the non-Christian spouses?

Please, would the gospel switch a light on inside them? Would they move from darkness to light? And please, Father, would we speak the truth in love to people who are living in sinful relationships?

Please, would they repent? And for our church, Father, please would we not adopt the sexual standards of the culture around us in here?

Please, would we strive for purity and a higher standard? Father God, we thank you for the blood of Jesus again, which forgives and washes us and redeems us for all our disobedience.

We pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.