

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL: A STUDY OF EPHESIANS

(LESSON EIGHTY-FIVE)

“PLEASING TO THE LORD”

EPHESIANS 5:1-10

1 Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children;

2 And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.

3 But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints;

4 Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks.

5 For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

6 Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.

7 Be not ye therefore partakers with them.

8 For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light.

9 (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;)

10 Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.

In **Ephesians 5** and verse **8**, Paul advised the believers in Ephesus that their past condition of being **darkness** and their present condition of being **light**, stand in stark contrast. The **New English Translation** renders the verse as follows: *“for you were at one time darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live like children of light.”*

Previously, in chapter **4** and verses **22-24**, the Apostle had described the difference between the believers’ past and present conditions in terms of the **“old man”** versus the **“new man.”** Now he restates the contrast using the imagery of **light** and **darkness**.

The word *“darkness”* is a translation of the Greek word **skotos**, which literally refers to “that sphere in which light is absent.” Here Paul uses darkness to describe the **character** of the life of the Ephesian believers before their conversion. Paul does not say “You were **in** darkness.” He says, “You **were** darkness!” They were ignorant of divine truth and virtue in ethical and moral matters, and this ignorance manifested itself in gross immorality. They were characterized by all the sinful conduct associated with the **“old man.”**

But Paul informs the believers that a great change had occurred as it related to their spiritual condition. As a result of God’s gracious intervention, they were no longer in a condition of darkness. He says, *“You were **at one time** darkness, **but now** you are light in the Lord.* The Greek word translated *“light”* is **phós: (foce)**, which can refer to literal light, but is used here figuratively to refer to those who are enlightened with the truth. The word refers to light itself, not to a mere lamp.

One expositor comments on Paul’s use of the word *“light”* here as follows: “The completeness of the change is indicated again by the use of the abstract term [for light]. **So possessed and penetrated were**

they by that truth, that they could be described not simply as enlightened but as themselves now light. And this 'in the Lord,' for it was in virtue of their fellowship with Christ that this new apprehension of things came to them, transforming their lives."

Brothers and sisters, we did nothing to earn or merit our new condition of being "*light!*" We are light only because we have a vital union with Jesus Christ, the One who in **John 8:12**, declared Himself to be "*the light of the world.*"

Brothers and sisters, our new identity in Christ calls for a new lifestyle! Paul says, "*Live like children of light.*" Since God is light, and light exposes, to walk or live as children of light, means that we have a responsibility to live our lives **Coram Deo**, i.e. "before the face of God." We must live with the awareness that "*everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must render an account*" (**Hebrews 4:12 New English Translation**). Since God is light, we as His children must live in a manner that reveals Him to a world that is lost in spiritual darkness.

In verse **9** Paul writes, "*(For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.*"

The **New English Translation** renders the verse as follows: "*for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth.*"

The **King James Version** translates the opening phrase as, "*For the fruit of the Spirit,*" while the **New English Translation** renders the same clause as, "*for the fruit of the light.*" It is the opinion of most scholars that "*light*" has the support of the more accurate Greek manuscripts. I am inclined to support this view because the immediate context favours it. In the previous verse Paul had written, "*For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light.*" In this verse, he uses the imagery of **light** and **darkness** to emphasize the contrast between the condition of a believer and that of an

unbeliever. This is not a major difference however, because Paul tells us in **Galatians 5:22**, that “*goodness*” is one of the manifestations of the fruit of the **Spirit**.

The Greek word translated “*fruit*” is **karpos**, which is literally used to refer to fruit, produce, or offspring. It describes that which is produced by the inherent energy of a living organism. **Karpos** is what something naturally produces. In the previous verse, Paul had informed the believers in Ephesus that they were now “*light in the Lord*,” and that since this was the case, they should “*live as children of light*.” Paul is now saying to them in essence, “Consistently display the fruit that is naturally produced by light, which is your present condition now.” In other words, a believer’s thoughts, utterances and actions, should be the fruit or the natural product of his or her essential being or character, which is light!

Brothers and sisters, it is impossible to be in darkness and light at the same time! Light produces fruit, and the fruit of light should be consistently borne in the life of the “*children of light!*” Paul mentions three manifestations of the fruit of light-**goodness, righteousness and truth**. We will briefly consider these three manifestations.

The word “*goodness*” is a translation of the Greek word, **agathósuné**: (**ag-ath-o-soo’- nay**). The word is derived from **agathos**, which refers to active goodness, virtue, excellence or kindness. The idea is of high moral character reflected in outward goodness. **Agathósuné** describes a positive moral quality which is characterized by an interest in the welfare of others. It is moral and spiritual excellence manifested in active kindness. It finds its fullest and highest expression in that which is willingly and sacrificially done for others. *Goodness* may be said to be, “love in action.”

Goodness then describes behaviour that benefits others instead of self. A “good” person is concerned for the spiritual and general well-being of others. The child of light who walks in daily dependence on the Holy

Spirit, brings forth *goodness* as a manifestation of the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and of the light which he or she now is.

The Greek word translated “*righteousness*” is **dikaioné**: (**dik-ah-yos-oo’-nay**), which is derived from a root word that means “straightness.” It refers to a state that conforms to an authoritative standard or norm, and so is in keeping with what God is in His holy character. God’s character is the definition and source of all righteousness. The righteousness of human beings is defined in terms of God’s righteousness. In short, righteousness is all that God **is**, all that He **approves**, all that He **demands**, and all that He **commands**. It is important for us to understand that righteousness is also all that God **provides**. He provides righteousness through the gospel of Jesus Christ, the perfectly Righteous One.

In **Romans 1:16-17** Paul writes the following:

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is God’s power for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

*17 For the **righteousness of God** is revealed in the gospel from faith to faith, just as it is written, “The righteous by faith will live.”*

The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation because the righteousness of God is revealed in the Gospel. When Paul speaks about the “*righteousness of God*,” he is talking about the free gift of His righteousness which He bestows upon unrighteous sinners who believe the Gospel. He is referring to the righteousness that is received by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. The Gospel is the good news that a sinner may receive the full measure of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, not based on anything that he or she has done, or will do, but based upon everything that Jesus Christ has done for him or her. This is the great power of the Gospel.

Brothers and sisters, one aspect of the fruit of light is a life that is righteous, rightly related to God, and rightly interacting with men. Righteousness means **rightness of character** before God and **rightness of actions** before men.

The word “*truth*” is a translation of the Greek word **alétheia**: (**al-ay’-thi-a**). The word refers to that which is true in any matter under consideration. It refers to the unveiled reality lying at the basis of an appearance, and agreeing with that appearance. It is the manifested, veritable essence of a matter. Truth is a declaration which has a corresponding reality, or a reality which is correctly set forth. Since God is Himself the great reality, that which correctly sets forth His nature is pre-eminently the Truth. Obviously whatever God says is “**the truth.**” The Lord Jesus Christ is the embodiment of “**the Truth.**”

Brothers and sisters, truth stands in opposition to insincerity and hypocrisy. As we walk in light, the fruit that comes from our lips and our lives will be truth. Persons are true when their practice correspond with their profession. So, when we as believers walk in the light and live like children of light, we demonstrate to the world that our walk and our life corresponds to our profession that Jesus Christ is our Lord. We are living witnesses of the truth of the Gospel that takes an unredeemed, wretched “**old man**” and saves him or her, and clothes him or her in the robe of Christ’s righteousness, thus making him or her a “**new man**” in Christ.

Paul says, “*For the fruit of the light consists in **all** goodness, righteousness, and truth.*” In using the word “*all*,” Paul’s idea may be that the fruit of light is **always** associated with goodness, righteousness and truth as its manifestations. In other words, these are the elements that characterize its fruit. Since it is fruit, it takes time to develop, but increasingly, the children of light are to be growing “*in all goodness, righteousness, and truth.*”

It is important for us to understand that “*goodness, righteousness, and truth*” are found only in believers, and they are manifested consistently as the result of the working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who submit to His divine will and power. We are now light in the Lord and as we walk in that truth, in the power of the Holy Spirit, He bears the fruit consistently.

The following illustration is taken from the daily devotional “**Our Daily Bread.**” It is entitled “*Seeing the Gospel:*”

“A man once asked a new acquaintance in a remote area of the world, ‘Have you ever heard the Gospel?’ ‘No,’ the other replied, ‘I have never heard it, but I have seen it.’ ‘What do you mean by that?’ the Christian responded. ‘Simply this,’ he said, ‘there is a man in our village whose life has been greatly influenced by a missionary who passed this way. Never have I seen such a change in a person! Before he met the man of God, alcohol ruled his life. He was lazy, neglected his family, and showed no interest in anyone else. Since then, however, his manner of living is completely different. He is no longer a slave to liquor. He works hard and is a good husband and father. I would be proud to have him as my neighbor. Yes, I have seen the Gospel and like it so well I would now like to hear it!’ **Because the Gospel had been lived eloquently, it could be told effectively.**”

Brothers and sisters, if we are to be faithful and credible witnesses for Christ, it is essential that we live out the Gospel of Christ. The message of His saving grace and transforming power must not only be verbalized, it must be demonstrated! If our deeds contradict our words, if our profession is not matched by our practice, if we do not walk our talk, it is better for us to remain silent.

The life of a believer should be a living sermon. Paul speaks to this in **2 Corinthians 3:1-3**. The **Message** translates the passage as follows:

1 Does it sound like we're patting ourselves on the back, insisting on our credentials, asserting our authority? Well, we're not. Neither do we need letters of endorsement, either to you or from you.

*2 You yourselves are all the endorsement we need. **Your very lives are a letter that anyone can read by just looking at you.***

3 Christ himself wrote it—not with ink, but with God's living Spirit; not chiseled into stone, but carved into human lives—and we publish it.

Last week I mentioned a hymn that my grandmother often sang when I was a boy. It was written by **Susan Warner** in 1868:

*Jesus bids us shine with a pure, clear light,
Like a little candle burning in the night.
In this world of darkness so let us shine—
You in your small corner, and I in mine.*

*Jesus bids us shine, first of all for Him;
Well He sees and knows it, if our light grows dim.
He looks down from Heaven to see us shine—
You in your small corner, and I in mine.*

*Jesus bids us shine, then, for all around;
Many kinds of darkness in the world are found—
Sin and want and sorrow; so we must shine—
You in your small corner, and I in mine.*

Someone once said, "May the example of our lives be so consistent with the testimony of our lips, that no one could ever say to us, 'Your actions speak so loud that I can't hear what you say.'"

In verse **10** Paul writes, "*Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.*"

The **New English Translation** renders the verse as follows: "*trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.*"

Verse **9** appears to be a parenthesis, as verse **10** is grammatically connected with verse **8**. If verse **9** were placed **after** verse **10**, the passage would read as follows: “*For you were at one time darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live like children of light— trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. For the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth*” (**New English Translation**).

The idea in Paul’s mind as it relates to this passage is that believers, who are “*light in the Lord,*” are required to live as “*children of light,*” by carefully examining and determining what is acceptable to the Lord. They are to regulate their conduct by a consideration of what is well pleasing to Him. For persons who are saved, what is pleasing to Jesus Christ is the ultimate standard of judging whether anything is right or wrong, worthy or unworthy.

The Greek word translated “*Proving,*” or “*trying to learn,*” is **dokimazó**: (**dok-im-ad’-zo**), which means, “to put to the test for the purpose of approving, and having found that the thing or person tested meets the specifications laid down by the test, then to place one’s sanction or approval on the thing or person tested.” The word was used in classic Greek to describe the examination of precious metals, usually by fire, to prove whether or not they were authentic and whether or not they measured up to the stated value. The idea then is not only of testing but also of determining the genuineness or value of a thing or a person. That which endured the test was referred to as **dokimos** i.e. (approved), and that which failed the test was referred to as called **adokimos** i.e. (disapproved).

Brothers and sisters, if we are to “*walk*” or “*live*” as “*children of light,*” we must put our thoughts, utterances and actions to the test in order to determine whether or not they are “*pleasing to the Lord.*” The word “*pleasing*” is the translation of a Greek word which means, “well-pleasing, acceptable.” As one commentator noted, “Those who walk in the light...find out what is acceptable to the Lord. They put every thought, word, and action to the test...What does the Lord think about

this? How does it appear in His presence? **Every area of life comes under the searchlight**—conversation, standard of living, clothes, books, business, pleasures, entertainments, furniture, friendships, vacations, cars, and sports.”

Brothers and sisters, it is as our minds are renewed through God’s Word, that we prove in our experience what is well-pleasing to God.

Commenting on verse **10**, **Steven Cole** made the following remarks:

“We do not determine what pleases the Lord by **our own feelings**, which fluctuate, or by **what the world or other Christians say or think**. We don’t even determine it by **our own conscience**, in that our conscience may be improperly informed. Rather, we learn what pleases the Lord through **growing to understand His Word**. Living to please the Lord is a fundamental difference between the believer and the unbeliever. An unbeliever may be a good man and even be somewhat righteous or upright, at least outwardly. He may be truthful. But, he does it all out of selfish motives, for his own self-respect, or so that others will think highly of him. But only believers **live to please the Savior**. We have a new personal relationship with this One who snatched us out of a horrible pit. We now evaluate everything we do by the question, ‘Does this please the Lord, who loved me and gave Himself for me?’ So, the first requirement for living in this dark world is to be children of light and to walk as children of light, doing everything to please the Lord.”

The Scottish theologian **John Eadie** explains that the words “*pleasing to the Lord*,” refers to that which the Lord has commanded in His Word and therefore approves of. He argues that the obedience of the believer is not motivated by what is traditionally accepted, or by unthinking conformity, but by that which is founded on a clear and discerning understanding of the will of Christ as it is expressed in the Word.

Eadie argues that the believer's obedience is not accepted because it pleases him or her to offer it, but because the Lord demands it. He argues that the believer is not to approve what pleases himself or herself, but rather what pleases his or her Divine Master.

In **1 Corinthians 6:12** and **10:23**, Paul cites slogans that the Corinthian believers apparently were using to justify their behaviour. Paul agrees with the slogans in part, but corrects them to show them how they have misused these ideas. The **New English Translation** renders the verses as follows:

1 Corinthians 6:12

[The Corinthians] *“All things are lawful for me”*— [Paul] *but not everything is beneficial.* [The Corinthians] *“All things are lawful for me”*— [Paul], *but I will not be controlled by anything.”*

1 Corinthians 10:23

[The Corinthians] *“Everything is lawful,”* [Paul] *but not everything is beneficial.* [The Corinthians] *“Everything is lawful,”* [Paul] *but not everything builds others up.”*

Brothers and sisters, as we are *“trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord,”* let us focus on that which is *“beneficial”* and *“edifying”* to ourselves and others, and ensure that we are not brought under the *“control”* of anything that we consider to be *“lawful.”*

In **Philippians 1:9-11**, we read the following:

9 And I pray this, that your love may abound even more and more in knowledge and every kind of insight

10 so that you can decide [dokimazó] what is best, and thus be sincere and blameless for the day of Christ,

11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

In verse 10 Paul says, “so that you can decide what is best.” The Greek translated “best” is **diapheró**: (**dee-af-er’-o**) which means, “to bear or carry through, to carry different ways, to carry in different directions, to differ, to excel or surpass.”

In the context of this verse, **diapheró** applies to those moral and spiritual concepts and actions which involve delicate and keen distinctions and a deep and keen discernment to recognize the differences. These are not the ordinary, everyday, easily understood spiritual assessments and obligations, but rather, the finer points of Christian conduct. Paul was not referring merely to the ability to distinguish between good and evil. Most persons are able to do that. Paul was concerned about distinguishing between the **good**, the **better** and the **best**. That kind of discernment enables a person to focus his or her time and energy on what really counts. This will result in the saint being “*sincere and blameless for the day of Christ.*” It is this quality of spiritual discernment that separates the mature saint from the immature saint, the strong believer from the weak believer.

Brothers and sisters, it is the Word of God, more than anything else, that gives us the ability to distinguish between the **good**, the **better** and the **best**. **Hebrews 5:11-14** confirms this statement:

11 On this topic we have much to say and it is difficult to explain, since you have become sluggish in hearing.

12 For though you should in fact be teachers by this time, you need someone to teach you the beginning elements of God’s utterances. You have gone back to needing milk, not solid food.

*13 For everyone who lives on milk is **inexperienced in the message of righteousness**, because he is an infant.*

14 But solid food is for the mature, whose perceptions are trained by practice to discern both good and evil.
(**New English Translation**)

In this matter of deciding what is best, **1 Corinthians 10:31** is an excellent rule of thumb. The **New English Translation** renders the verse as follows: “*So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.*”

Brothers and sisters, as we endeavour to put our thoughts, utterances and actions to the test in order to determine whether or not they are “*pleasing to the Lord,*” the prayers of David recorded in **Psalm 19:12-14**, and **Psalm 139:23-24**, will prove instructive and helpful.

The **New Living Translation** renders **Psalm 19:12-14** as follows:

12 How can I know all the sins lurking in my heart? Cleanse me from these hidden faults.

13 Keep your servant from deliberate sins! Don't let them control me. Then I will be free of guilt and innocent of great sin.

14 May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

The **Message** translates **Psalm 139:23-24** in the following way:

23 Investigate my life, O God, find out everything about me; Cross-examine and test me, get a clear picture of what I'm about;

24 See for yourself whether I've done anything wrong—then guide me on the road to eternal life.