

UNEDITED DRAFT

Dear Friends in Christ,

I have a question I'd really like you to wrestle with today. The question is simple this: What difference does it make in your daily life that you are a Christian? Should being a follower of Jesus change you, or is the only difference that the Christian goes to church once a week and the unbeliever gets to sleep in? Should there be a change in your life? Is there a change in your life? Is the change a minor one? An imperceptible one? Or is it drastic and evident? If someone followed you around on any day but Sunday, would they know you are a follower of Jesus? Should they know you are a follower of Jesus? Is the change in a Christian merely something on the inside, or is it also something that is or should be evident on the outside?

Is the difference only in your destiny? Or is it in your daily life?

Is the difference only in your heart? Or will it also be in your daily words and actions?

What difference does it make that you are a Christian?

Let's keep those questions in mind as we turn to Ephesians 5:8-14. Paul's letter to the Ephesians is pure gold. If you are not familiar with this letter, it's time to study it. See if you can read through it three times this coming week.

This letter answers for us some of the biggest questions in life. Before answering the question we're thinking about today, it already answered the questions: Who are you? How does God feel about you? What does God do for you? Paul has explained that we are by nature dead in our sins. We are selfish creatures who live to please self. We are therefore by nature objects of God's wrath. However... **"because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved."**

This comes first! For Paul the most important thing is being rooted, established and growing in Christ's love. We need to keep coming back to this basic and essential truth of Christianity. We are saved **by God's grace**, not our efforts. We are saved **by faith**, not works. How can God love so much that he would do this for me, a daily, horrible, wretched rebel, criminal, sinner? Meditating on that love, and growing in our knowledge and appreciation of that love is job number 1 for Christ and his church.

But what else? Is that it? Having established out identity as dearly loved children of God, and having established God unconditional, immeasurable love for us, Paul is now able to talk about "what now." The last half of his letter, starting in chapter 4, Paul says:

4:1: **"I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received."**

Live a life that is worthy of the calling you have received! It sets the tone for the last three chapters of this letter. And 5:1 says, **"Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children."** Children imitate their parents. If we are God's children we will have an urgent desire to be like our heavenly Father, and imitate our brother Jesus.

And now let's turn our attention to the section we want to look at today: Ephesians 5:8-14. I want to read it all to you first, then we'll go back and look at more detail. Again, keep the question in mind: What difference does it make that you are Christian?

8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10 and find out what pleases the Lord. 11 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. 13 But

**everything exposed by the light becomes visible, 14 for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said:
“Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”**

Light and darkness are contrasted here. What is meant by light?

- Light = *Jesus* who is the light of the world. Matthew 4:16: **“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.”** (Jesus.) John 8:12 **“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”** Jesus at the mount of transfiguration shown with light. He himself is light. Gospel! Good news! Jesus is the one who forgives, gives life and salvation. He is light! One day in heaven we will live in the glory of his light forever.
- Light = *His followers*. **“You are the light of the world.”** So those who follow are in the light, and become light to the world as well. But what does it mean for us to walk in the light? There are two aspects of walking (or being) in the light:
- Light = *truth* (intellectually.) Proverbs 6:23 **For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life.** Psalm 119:105: **Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.** So if Jesus is the Word made flesh, then Jesus himself is the truth of God, and he himself is light... which, as we already heard, he did claim for himself. The light of the world.
- Light = *believing the truth* (faith). Darkness is unbelief. Romans 1:21 **For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.**
- Light = *holy living* (morally). 1 John 2:6 **“Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.”** When your daily life is like Jesus’ daily life, then you are walking in the light. You do what Jesus did.

So back to the text:

8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

First this tells us who we are... our identity. You were once darkness. You didn’t know the Lord or his truth. By nature we are ignorant of the gospel. You walked in deeds of selfishness. But then God called you through the gospel in word and sacrament. He gave you all that belongs to Jesus. He forgave your sins. He enlightened you and made you his children. And now you are light *in the Lord*. You are not light in and of yourself. You are not holy and blameless by your own deeds. But you are nevertheless holy and blameless *in the Lord*. His holiness belongs to you! You are now light.

So he says:

Live as children of light. And here is the answer to our question: Does being a Christian make a difference in your daily life? The answer is a resounding “yes!” Live as children of the light. Literally the Greek says, “Walk [continuously; keep on walking] as children of light.” God brought us into his light to live life in a way that reflects his light. As followers of Jesus, he has called us to make a real difference in this world through a life that is transformed by Jesus.

But what does that transformed life look like? We don’t have to guess:

For the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10 and find out what pleases the Lord. Those who are no longer darkness but are light, will have fruits of the light, and they are 1) **goodness**. This refers to moral goodness in your words and actions to others. You

will think of others, help others, encourage others. You won't simply think the best, you will *do* the best for others. Your outward actions will reflect that you are in the light.

2) Righteousness. That term has more to do with your relationship with God. You will do what God enjoys and you will not do what God hates. In view of what God has declared you to be... the identity he has given you... you will strive to become the same. You will want to be righteous (what God is looking for) in your daily life.

3) Truth: If you walk in the light of God's truth, then you will strive to know the truth of God, believe the truth of God, line your life up with the truth of God, and share the truth of God. What is real? What is right? What is true? The fruit of the light is to know it and share it!

And find out what pleases the Lord. This point is bigger than it first appears. Don't we often presume to tell God what is pleasing to him? "Well I just believe in my heart... It seems to me... well I believe in this circumstance that..." How God wants you to live is not a variable. It doesn't change with circumstances. God's law of love is absolute. Love him above all. Love your neighbor as yourself. How exactly do you show love for God and neighbor? Study his word because he says! You have to work at it... to find out what pleases the Lord. God doesn't promise to speak it directly into your heart. He does promise to speak it through his Word.

So this means that the changed life we live includes a devotion to studying the Word of God, meditating on it and then putting into practice in our daily lives.

Then God makes clear that an unchanged life is just not an option. Living like the unbelievers of this world is just not possible:

11 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. 13 But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, 14 for it is light that makes everything visible.

Not only is it wrong to live like those in darkness, you should have nothing to do with it. You shouldn't condone it. You shouldn't tolerate it. You should expose it.

God is calling you to step up and say something, not quietly disagree. To point out sin, so that you can then turn the repentant to forgiveness in Jesus.

This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

Most commentators think this is an ancient Easter hymn. Paul quotes it here to show our goal in exposing the deeds of darkness. That those who are spiritually asleep and spiritually dead, might wake up and stand in the light and live. That "Christ will shine on you." That many more will step out of the darkness and into the light of Christ.

Back to our original question: Will being a Christian make a difference in our everyday life? Looking through these verses again, Paul taught us: 1) God has called us out of darkness and into light. 2) God calls us to live and walk in the light... to be active, not passive in our faith. 3) He wants us to live fruitful lives in the light, not fruitless lives. 4) He calls us to live his way, not man's way. 5) He tells us not to participate in deeds of darkness, but to expose them. The goal of all of this is 6) that others who are sleeping in the dark will wake up, repent and come into the light of Christ's forgiveness just as we are.

Does that sound like a typical life to you? Doesn't that sound like a radically different life than what the people of the world live? It's as different from a typical life as night is from day... as darkness is from light.

God has called you to make a real difference in the world. Everywhere you go and everything you do, shine with the light of Jesus. In your worldview, words, actions, live for Jesus, in Jesus, to Jesus. Live as children of light! Amen.