

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

## **(LESSON EIGHTY-SIX)**

### ***“HAVE NO FELLOWSHIP WITH DARKNESS”***

#### **EPHESIANS 5:8-12**

*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.*

*11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.*

*12 For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.*

In **Ephesians** chapter **5** and verse **8**, Paul informs the believers in Ephesus that their **past** condition of **darkness**, and their **present** condition of **light**, stand in stark contrast. Previously, in chapter **4** and verses **22-24**, he had described the difference between their past and present conditions in terms of the “**old man**” versus the “**new man.**” In verse **8**, he restates the contrast using the imagery of **light** and **darkness**.

Needless to say, their new identity in Christ called for a new lifestyle! Paul exhorts them to, “*Walk as children of light.*” Since believers are the children of a God who is light, they have a responsibility to live their

lives in a manner that reveals Him to a world that is lost in spiritual darkness.

The **New English Translation** renders verse **9** as follows: *“for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth.”* In this verse, Paul is saying in essence to the believers in Ephesus, “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!

In verse **10** Paul writes, *“Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.”* The Greek word translated “Proving” 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, to place one’s sanction or approval on the thing or person tested.” The idea in Paul’s mind 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. As believers we are not to approve what pleases us, but rather what pleases God.

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. It is as our minds are renewed through God’s Word, that we are able to prove what is well-pleasing to Him.

In verse **11** Paul writes, *“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.”*

The **New English Translation** renders the verse as follows: *“Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.”*

The words “*fellowship*” in the **King James Version**, and “*participate*” in the **New English Translation**, are the translation of a Greek word which means, “to become a partaker together with others.” The word refers to a joint-participation between two or more individuals in a common interest and a common activity.

The word is in a construction in the Greek which forbids the continuance of an action already in progress. This clearly implies that some of the believers in Ephesus were continuing to participate with unbelievers in sinful activity.

Earlier in the chapter, in verses **6** and **7**, Paul issued a similar warning to the Ephesian believers as he does in verse **11**. The **King James Version** translates the verses as follows:

*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.*

Commenting on the difference between the word “*partakers*” in verse **7** and the word “*participate*” in verse **11**, the American theologian **Wayne Barber**, made the following insightful remarks:

*“Therefore be not **partakers** with them,” which is very similar to the word **participate** in verse **11**. But there is a difference. **Partakers** means simply that you join in with somebody and do what they do. It may be a one-time thing, maybe a two-time thing or whatever. You just happen in a weak moment to come along side of them and you do what they do. But the word...**participate**’ goes a step further. It means to share in common with. In the first situation you are partaking of the **deed**. In the other it goes further and you are beginning to absorb within you the very **attitudes** of the people that are around you. Not only are you **partaking** in the deeds, but you are **sharing things in common** with people who wear garments of darkness. We are not to do*

that but are to wear the garment of light. We have the power in the new garment to refuse the deeds of darkness...We refuse the deeds of darkness when we wear the right garment. We have the power to do that. So we can be **in** the world, but not **of** the world. You see, a boat in water is by **design**. Water in the boat is **disaster**. We are not to have the water in us, we are to be in the water. We have to reach them for Christ, but not partake with them and not share in common the deeds of darkness. Only in the garment of Christ do we have the power to refuse the deeds of darkness."

Brothers and sisters, how is it with us? Are we occasionally, in weak moments, **partaking** in sin with others, or have we absorbed within us the very attitudes of unsaved persons, to the extent that we have things in common with them and are becoming like them? Is our association with them hindering us from becoming like Jesus?

What exactly are the "*unfruitful works of darkness*" which Paul mentions in verse **11**? By "*unfruitful*" is meant not merely barren or worthless, but positively evil. "*Works*" or "*deeds*" of darkness are those works which spring from darkness, i.e. from an ignorance of God. The "*fruit of the light*" are the natural products which light or divine knowledge produces.

We will consider 5 passages of Scripture, reflecting the rendering of the **New English Translation**, which give descriptions of these "*unfruitful works of darkness*." We will also offer comments which we hope will be helpful.

### **Romans 1:28-32**

*28 And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what should not be done.*

*29 They are filled with every kind of unrighteousness, wickedness, covetousness, malice. They are rife with envy, murder, strife, deceit, hostility. They are gossips,*

*30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, contrivers of all sorts of evil, disobedient to parents,*

*31 senseless, covenant-breakers, heartless, ruthless.*

*32 Although they fully know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but also approve of those who practice them.*

In verse **32**, Paul informs us that the persons of whom he is writing, have a full experiential knowledge, not only that the things they are practicing are wrong, but also that they themselves are deserving of death. They are aware that this is God's verdict, however much they seek to rationalize their behaviour. But their knowledge does not deter them from indulging in these forms of ungodliness. This is an amazing realization, that there are people who have a full understanding of what God requires and still refuse to obey Him. Their sins are not sins of ignorance, but of blatant rebellion. They persist in their sinful practices despite the clear witness of their conscience and they are in a fellowship of evil with other evil-doers! These persons express a hearty approval of those who continually practice the sins mentioned in the passage and endorse their depraved lifestyle.

### **1 Corinthians 6:9-10**

*9 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! The sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, passive homosexual partners, practicing homosexuals,*

*10 thieves, the greedy, drunkards, the verbally abusive, and swindlers will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

### **Galatians 5:19-21**

*19 Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, depravity,*

*20 idolatry, sorcery, hostilities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish rivalries, dissensions, factions,*

*21 envying, murder, drunkenness, carousing, and similar things. I am warning you, as I had warned you before: Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God!*

## **2 Timothy 3:1-5**

*1 But understand this, that in the last days difficult times will come.*

*2 For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy,*

*3 unloving, irreconcilable, slanderers, without self-control, savage, opposed to what is good,*

*4 treacherous, reckless, conceited, loving pleasure rather than loving God.*

*5 They will maintain the outward appearance of religion but will have repudiated its power. So avoid people like these.*

Many persons understand this passage to be speaking of the time just before our Lord's return, but the biblical usage of the phrase "*the last days*," indicates that it refers to the whole period of time between the first coming of our Lord and His second coming. In other words, for the last 2,000 years we have been living in the last days.

What the apostle wanted Timothy to know, is that believers in **every** era of the Church have endured, and will have to endure difficult times, times of great stress when their faith will be pushed to the limit of its endurance. Furthermore, in verse **5** he reveals a rather startling thing. He informs Timothy that one of the factors that will cause these times of great stress, and will characterize them, is the presence and activity of false believers, those who have made a **profession** of faith but who do not **possess** faith. Of these false believers Paul writes, "*They will*

*maintain the outward appearance of religion but will have repudiated its power. So avoid people like these.”*

In other words, Paul says that the primary cause of these repetitive cycles of great stress and danger is the hypocritical lives of persons who outwardly appear to be pious, religious, committed and devoted, but who are actually in a fallen unregenerate condition. They have never been “born from above.” Hypocritical Christianity is one of the root causes of these times of great stress.

It is of these false believers that **Jude** wrote in verse 4 of his epistle: *“For certain men have secretly slipped in among you—men who long ago were marked out for the condemnation I am about to describe—ungodly men who have turned the grace of our God into a license for evil and who deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ”* (**New English Translation**).

Why would persons who are exposed to the Bible, claim to have been **born again**, participate in worship, and are even involved in ministry, reflect the sinful attitudes described in this passage, to the extent that they cause so much disturbance? The answer is in the fact that they **“repudiate or deny the power of Christianity,”** or as **Jude** put it, they *“deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.”*

What is the power that these false believers repudiate or deny? It is the power of the Cross! In **1 Corinthians 18-24**, Paul wrote,

*18 For **the message about the cross** is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved **it is the power of God.***

*19 For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and I will thwart the cleverness of the intelligent.”*

*20 Where is the wise man? Where is the expert in the Mosaic law?*

*Where is the debater of this age? Has God not made the wisdom of the world foolish?*

*21 For since in the wisdom of God the world by its wisdom did not know God, God was pleased to save those who believe by the foolishness of preaching.*

*22 For Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks ask for wisdom,*

*23 but we preach about **a crucified Christ**, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.*

*24 But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, **Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.***

It is when we allow the Cross of the **“crucified Christ”** to have its effect upon us that we will experience the power of God in our lives. It is the denial of the **“message about the cross”** that constitutes the kind of Christianity which seeks merely to *“maintain the outward appearance of religion,”* but which repudiates or denies its power.

Without the power of the Cross of Christ operating in the lives of professing believers what is reflected is what is present, merely an appearance or form of the truth!

The **New English Translation** renders **Mark 8:34-37** as follows:

*34 Then Jesus called the crowd, along with his disciples, and said to them, “If anyone wants to become my follower, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.*

*35 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me and because of the gospel will save it.*

*36 For what benefit is it for a person to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his life?*

*37 What can a person give in exchange for his life?*



*38 For if anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”*

Brothers and sisters, hear me please, unless and until we are willing to say “**No**” to what the cross has denied, what it has put to death within us, we will not experience or enjoy the full benefits of eternal life that are available to us now.

### **1 Peter 4:3-4**

*3 For the time that has passed was sufficient for you to do what the non-Christians desire. You lived then in debauchery, evil desires, drunkenness, carousing, drinking bouts, and wanton idolatries.*

*4 So they are astonished when you do not rush with them into the same flood of wickedness, and they vilify you.*

Instead of believers having a joint-participation with unbelievers in the “*unfruitful works of darkness,*” we should “*reprove*” or “*expose*” them. The Greek word translated “*reprove*” or “*expose*” is **elegchó**: (**el-eng’-kho**), which means, “to reprove or rebuke so as to bring about conviction or confession of guilt.” The idea is to rebuke another in such a way that they are compelled to see and to admit the error of their ways. **Elegchó** was used in the Greek law courts not merely of a reply to an opposing attorney, but of a refutation of his argument.

In the context of **Ephesians 5:11**, Paul’s exhortation is for believers, who are now “*light in the Lord,*” to rebuke and expose those who are still in darkness, and are in fact darkness, by living like children of light, bearing the fruit of goodness, righteousness, and truth, which are the natural products of the light which they now are.

The life of a believer should consistently and convincingly convict those who are darkness. It is not so much what we say, but how we live that should convict others. In fact, the testimony of our **walk** is what validates the testimony of our **words**!

**Charles Hodge** comments that,

“The duty of Christians in reference to the works of darkness is twofold; first, to have no communion with them; and secondly, to reprove them... We are said to have fellowship [with] anything which we delight in and partake of. To have fellowship with the works of darkness, therefore, is to delight in them and to participate in them. All such association is forbidden as inconsistent with the character of the children of light.

Our second duty is to reprove them...When the Spirit is said to reprove men of sin, it means that He sheds such light upon their sins as to reveal their true character, and to produce the consequent consciousness of guilt and pollution...The duty, therefore, here enjoined is to shed light on these works of darkness; to exhibit them in their true nature as vile and destructive. By this method they are corrected; as is more fully taught in the following verses. The ethics as well as the theology of the Bible are founded on the principle, that knowledge and holiness, ignorance and sin, are inseparable. If you impart knowledge you secure holiness; and if you render ignorant you deprave. This of course is not true of secular knowledge... It is true only of that knowledge which the Scriptures call spiritual discernment.”

The following story was told by **Vance Havner**: “Some time ago a friend of mine took me to a restaurant where they must have loved darkness rather than light. I stumbled into the dimly-lit cavern, fumbled for a chair, and mumbled that I needed a flashlight in order to read the menu. When the food came I ate it by faith and not by sight. Gradually, however, I began to make out objects a little more clearly. My host said, 'Funny, isn't it, how we get used to the dark?' 'Thank you,' I replied, 'You have given me a new sermon subject.'”

Paul says, “*And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.*”

**Warren Wiersbe** made the following remarks relative to this verse:

"Light reveals God; light produces fruit; but light also exposes what is wrong. No surgeon would willingly operate in darkness lest he made a false move and take a life. How could an artist paint a true picture in darkness? The light reveals the truth and exposes the true character of things. This explains why the unsaved person stays clear of the church and the Bible. God's light reveals his true character, and the exposure is not very complimentary. As we Christians walk in light, we refuse to fellowship with the darkness, and we expose the dark things of sin for what they really are.

*'I am come a light into the world,'* said Jesus (**John 12:46**). He also said to His disciples, *'Ye are the light of the world'* (**Matthew 5:14**). When He was here on earth, the perfection of His character and conduct exposed the sinfulness of those around Him. This is one reason why the religious leaders hated Him and sought to destroy Him. *'If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin, but now they have no cloak for their sin'* (**John 15:22**). Just as a healthy person unconsciously exposes the handicaps and sicknesses of people he visits in a hospital, so the Christian exposes the darkness and sin around him just by living like a Christian. Paul tells us to live balanced lives- **positively**, to walk in the light; **negatively**, to denounce and expose the wickedness of those in the darkness. It is not enough simply to expose the wickedness of those in the darkness. It is not enough simply to expose sin. We must also bear fruit."

In verse **12** Paul writes, *"For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret."*

The **New English Translation** renders the verse as follows: *"For the things they do in secret are shameful even to mention."*

Brothers and sisters, this verse is not the easiest to understand and interpret. The Apostle seems to be saying that while it is necessary for us

to expose and rebuke the “*unfruitful deeds of darkness,*” we must do so without relishing or glorying in them. We certainly desire for the testimony of the redeemed to be authentic, but they must **never, ever**, treat with sin lightly or frivolously. We must **never, ever**, celebrate sin.

In **Romans 6:20-21** Paul wrote the following to the believers in Rome:

*20 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free with regard to righteousness.*

*21 So what benefit did you then reap from those things that you are now **ashamed** of? For the end of those things is death.*

**(New English Translation)**

The **New Living Translation** renders the verses in the following way:

*20 When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the obligation to do right.*

*21 And what was the result? You are now **ashamed** of the things you used to do, things that end in eternal doom.*

The word “*ashamed*” in verse **21**, is the translation of a Greek word which means, “to experience a painful feeling or sense of loss of status because of some particular event or activity.” It describes one’s consciousness of guilt or of exposure or the fear of embarrassment. The word is associated with being afraid, feeling shame which prevents one from doing something, a reluctance to say or do something because of fear of humiliation, experiencing a lack of courage to stand up for something, or feeling shame because of what one has done.

Regarding this matter, **John Calvin** made the following comments: “As soon as the godly begin to be enlightened by the Spirit of Christ and the preaching of the gospel, they freely acknowledge that the whole of their past life, which they lived without Christ, is worthy of condemnation. So far from trying to excuse it, they are in fact

ashamed of themselves. Indeed, they go farther, and continually bear their disgrace in mind, so that the shame of it may make them more truly and willingly humble before God."

Brothers and sisters, are we thoroughly ashamed of the things we used to do before we were saved? Do we freely acknowledge that the whole of our past life, which we lived without Christ, is worthy of condemnation? Do we ever speak about the sordid events of our pre-conversion days in a light or frivolous manner?

According to **Calvin**, if we do not understand and appreciate that the whole of our past life is worthy of condemnation, our minds have not yet been sufficiently enlightened by the Spirit of Christ and the preaching of the gospel.

The Apostle Paul's letters indicate clearly that he experienced a painful feeling, or sense of loss of status because of his rabid opposition to Christianity before he was converted. He freely acknowledged that the whole of his past life, which he had lived without Christ, was worthy of condemnation. Consequently, he **never, ever**, spoke of his past life in a frivolous manner.

We will let him speak for himself. The 2 passages which we will consider reflect the rendering of the **New English Translation**:

### **1 Corinthians 15:8-10**

*8 Last of all, as though to one born at the wrong time, he appeared to me also.*

*9 For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.*

*10 But by the grace of God I am what I am...*

## **1 Timothy 1:12-17**

*12 I am grateful to the one who has strengthened me, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he considered me faithful in putting me into ministry,*

*13 even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor, and an arrogant man. But I was treated with mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief,*

*14 and our Lord's grace was abundant, bringing faith and love in Christ Jesus.*

*15 This saying is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"—and I am the worst of them!*

*16 But here is why I was treated with mercy: so that in me as the worst, Christ Jesus could demonstrate his utmost patience, as an example for those who are going to believe in him for eternal life.*

*17 Now to the eternal king, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever! Amen.*

Commenting on **Ephesians 5:12**, **John MacArthur** made the following remarks with which we will bring our Lesson to a close:

"Some things are so vile that they should be discussed in as little detail as possible, because even describing them is morally and spiritually dangerous. Some diseases, chemicals, and nuclear by-products are so extremely deadly that even the most highly trained and best-protected technicians and scientists who work with them are in constant danger. No sensible person would work around such things carelessly or haphazardly. In the same way, some things are so spiritually disgraceful and dangerous that they should be sealed off not only from direct contact but even from conversation. **They should be exposed only to the extent necessary to be rid of them.** Some books and articles written by Christians on various moral issues are so

explicit that they almost do as much to spread as to cure the problem. We can give *God's* diagnosis and solution for sins without portraying every sordid detail. Our resource for exposing evil is Scripture, which is the light...and is 'profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness'"