

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

## **(LESSON EIGHTY-FOUR)**

### ***“THAT WAS THEN: THIS IS NOW”***

#### **EPHESIANS 5:1-8**

*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.*

In **Ephesians 5:5**, Paul makes it clear that persons who deliberately and persistently live in sin, have no share in the kingdom of God. He writes, *“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.”*

Paul is not arguing here that a person’s sins can cause him or her to lose his or her salvation. He is saying rather, that a **lifestyle** of unrighteous, unholy behaviour is a reflection that one has never been regenerated. His exhortation deals with the habitual practice of sin, not occasional acts of sin.

In verse **6** Paul writes, *“Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.”*

The word “*deceive*” is the translation of the Greek word **apataó: (ap-at-ah’-o)**, which means “to lead astray, mislead, cheat, delude, beguile, seduce into error.” The idea is to cause someone to have misleading or erroneous views concerning the truth.

The word is in a construction in the Greek which forbids the continuation of an action already taking place. It is apparent that some of the Ephesian believers were justifying their continuance in a sinful, immoral lifestyle by allowing themselves to be deceived into thinking that they could do so and still profess to be saved! Paul is warning them to stop allowing themselves to be deceived because the wrath of God comes upon persons who practice immorality, impurity, covetousness and idolatry.

In verse **7**, he writes, *“Be not ye therefore partakers with them.”* Paul is warning the believers here that, in light of the truth that persons who practice the sins he has enumerated in verses **3** and **4** will not inherit the kingdom of God, they are not to allow themselves to be influenced to participate in these defiling vices. Paul is reminding believers that though they are “**in**” the world, they are not “**of**” the world.

In verse **8**, the Apostle informs the believers of his reason for exhorting them not to lapse into their former sinful lifestyle. He says, *“For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light.”*

The **New English Translation** furnishes this rendering: *“for you were at one time darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live like children of light.”*

The **Living Bible** translates the verse as follows: *“For though once your heart was full of darkness, now it is full of light from the Lord, and your behavior should show it!”*

In this verse Paul advises the believers in Ephesus that their past condition of being **darkness** and their present condition of being **light**, stand in stark contrast. Previously, in chapter **4** and verses **22-24**, he 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 between believers and unbelievers by using the imagery of **light** and **darkness**.

Brothers and sisters, the sobering reality is that every human being belongs to one of two kingdoms, either the kingdom of darkness, or the kingdom of light. Every unsaved person belongs to the kingdom of darkness and every saved person belongs to the kingdom of light. Every unsaved person not only **walks in** darkness, but **is** darkness!

Paul says to the believers in Ephesus, *“you **were** at one time darkness.”* The verb *“were,”* is in the emphatic position in the Greek. Paul is highlighting the fact that all the sexual immorality, impurity, greed, vulgar speech, foolish talk, and coarse joking that had once characterized their lifestyle, were now behind them. He is saying in effect, *“That was who you **were then**, but that is not who you **are now!**”*

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. They were ignorant of divine truth and virtue in ethical and moral matters, and this ignorance manifested itself in their gross immorality. They were characterized by all the sinful conduct associated with the “**old man.**” Paul does not say “You were **in** darkness.” He says, “You **were** darkness!”

The great Protestant reformer **John Calvin**, commenting on this verse stated that, “Darkness is the name here given to the whole nature of man before regeneration; for, where the brightness of God does not shine, there is nothing but fearful darkness.”

Brothers and sisters, the unsaved individual is the very essence of darkness, and that is exactly what we were before the amazing grace of God delivered us! We were not merely in the dark, but we were **identified** with the darkness of ignorance and sin. We were not only living or abiding in darkness, but we were ourselves actual and genuine darkness!

In **John 3:16-21** we read the following:

*16 For this is the way God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.*

*17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world should be saved through him.*

*18 The one who believes in him is not condemned. The one who does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God.*

*19 Now this is the basis for judging: that the light has come into the world **and people loved the darkness rather than the light**, because their deeds were evil.*

*20 For everyone who does evil deeds hates the light and does not come to the light, so that their deeds will not be exposed.*

*21 But the one who practices the truth comes to the light, so that it may be plainly evident that his deeds have been done in God.*

**(New English Translation)**

In verse **19** our Lord said, “*People loved the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil.*” He says their deeds were evil. This was their practice. Their practice was the evidence of what resided in their heart. Their lifestyle clearly indicated what they really loved! They loved darkness. They loved their sin! Unrepentant sinners do not want the light because they do not want to be exposed. This truth should help us to understand that when persons reject the Gospel, they are rejecting Jesus, the Light of the World!

The Australian New Testament scholar, **Peter Thomas O’Brien**, made the following observation relative to **Ephesians 5:8**: “Surprisingly, the readers are not presented simply as having been in the realm of darkness and being now in the sphere of light, although this would have been true enough...It is not their environment or the surroundings in which they and the rest of humanity live that is in view. Rather, they themselves were once darkness, but now they are light in the Lord. **Those ruled by the dominion of darkness or of light represent that dominion in their own persons. So, when they were converted, it was their lives, not their surroundings, that were changed from darkness to light.** This radical transformation had taken place in the Lord. He is the one who has made the decisive difference, and it is through their union with him that they have entered a new dominion and become light.”

Brothers and sisters, according to **1 John 1:5-6**, if a person is **habitually** conducting his or her life in the sphere of darkness, he or she has not been born again. The **New English Translation** renders the verses as follows:

5 Now this is the gospel message we have heard from him and announce to you: **God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all.**

6 If we say we have fellowship with him and yet keep on **walking in the darkness**, we are lying and not practicing the truth.

7 But if **we walk in the light** as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

It is very important for us to understand that what we profess with our lips (“*If we say*”), should be validated by our life (“*If we walk*”). John is saying to us that if our life does not consistently confirm what our lips proclaim, we are lying.

Paul says, “You were **at one time** darkness, **but now** you are light in the Lord. Live like children of light.”

This “**But Now**” is one of the great, grace-impregnated “**But Now’s**” in the Bible. Let us consider a few others:

### **Romans 3:21**

“**But now** apart from the law the righteousness of God (although it is attested by the law and the prophets) has been disclosed.”

### **Romans 6:22**

“**But now**, freed from sin and enslaved to God, you have your benefit leading to sanctification, and the end is eternal life.”

### **Romans 7:6**

“**But now** we have been released from the law, because we have died to what controlled us, so that we may serve in the new life of the Spirit and not under the old written code.”

### **Ephesians 2:13**

“**But now** in Christ Jesus you who used to be far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

## **1 Peter 2:10**

*“You once were not a people, **but now** you are God’s people. You were shown no mercy, **but now** you have received mercy.”*

All these “**But Now’s**” indicate clearly that transformation has occurred. They all shout, “**Who you were is no longer who you are!**” They all testify, “**That was then, but this is now!**” They encourage us to think and live in the present reality and not in past reality.

In chapter **2** of his letter, Paul twice reminds the Ephesian believers of who they **were**. He does so in verses **1-3** and verses **11-12**. We will read the passages from the **New English Translation**.

## **Ephesians 2:1-3**

*1 And although you were dead in your offenses and sins,*

*2 in which you formerly lived according to this world’s present path, according to the ruler of the domain of the air, the ruler of the spirit that is now energizing the sons of disobedience,*

*3 among whom all of us also formerly lived out our lives in the cravings of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath even as the rest...*

## **Ephesians 2:11-12**

*11 Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh—who are called “uncircumcision” by the so-called “circumcision” that is performed on the body by human hands—*

*12 that you were at that time without the Messiah, alienated from the citizenship of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*

Why does Paul remind the Ephesian believers of who they **were**? Brothers and sisters, remembering who we were, should serve to motivate us to live now, in a way that will reflect who we truly and eternally are-children of light! Have you ever noticed that in a jewelry

store, precious stones are displayed on a black cloth? The reason for this is that light-coloured gemstones look better on darker backgrounds because the contrast calls attention to the jewelry. Your old life and mine, are the “black cloths” on which our resplendent new life in Christ is being displayed.

Paul says, “*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, light is a condition of sight and therefore of knowledge. According to **1 John 2:11**, when we walk in darkness we do not know where we are going. The Gospel gives light. Paul informs us of this in **2 Timothy 1:9-10**. The **New English Translation** renders the verses as follows:

*9 He [God] is the one who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not based on our works but on his own purpose and grace, granted to us in Christ Jesus before time began,*

*10 but now made visible through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus. He has broken the power of death and brought life and immortality to **light** through the gospel!*

It is the light of the Gospel that brings life and immortality. The light of the Gospel enters into those who believe it and becomes, in some sense, a part of themselves. This of course, obligates them to live their lives in

a manner that is in harmony with the light which has so transformed them.

Paul says that we formerly **were** darkness. We were spiritually blind. Not only did we not see or appreciate the truth of God and His glory, we did not have the ability or the desire to see and appreciate these things. We did not sense our need for the Saviour, nor did we understand the absolute holiness and justice of God. Therefore, we lived entirely for ourselves and for our own pleasure.

How did God deliver us from our state of darkness and death? Paul informs us of this in **2 Corinthians 4:6**: *“For God, who said ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ is the one who shined in our hearts to give us the light of the glorious knowledge of God in the face of Christ”* (**New English Translation**).

When God saved us, He shone His light into our hearts and dispelled our darkness. We saw our true condition as guilty sinners, but we also saw the all sufficiency of Jesus and His death on the Cross to atone for all our sins. We had a new understanding of God’s Word and a new desire to know God. Now we hate the sin that we formerly lived in and we long to be like our Saviour and Lord. We desire to walk in the light, rather than in darkness, because God has made us light in the Lord.

Regarding the believer’s transformation from being darkness to being light, **Steven Cole** makes the following insightful comments:

“Paul does not say that we used to be **in** the darkness, whereas now we are **in** the light, although this is true...Rather, he says that we used to **be** darkness, but now we **are** light in the Lord. Being children of light implies that this profound change comes from God's power in the new birth. It is an act of His creative power. Just as He at the first created light out of the darkness, so now He has changed us from being darkness itself into being light in the Lord.”

Brothers and sisters, it is very important for us to understand that we are now light *“in the Lord.”* We did nothing to earn or merit this *“light!”* In other words, 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.”* We who once were darkness, are now light, by virtue of the fact that we are in eternal covenant unity with Christ, who in turn is in perfect fellowship with the Father, according to **1 John 1:3**. And **1 John 1:5** informs us that the Father is Himself Light!

One commentator expresses it this way: “Our light is derived from Him — not a ray of it comes from ourselves. But somehow our incorporation in Christ allows us to actually be light, however imperfect. We *‘participate in the divine nature,’* says Peter (**2 Peter 1:4**). So authentic is our participation, so real is our light, that in eternity we will actually be part of the light ourselves. Jesus said in his Mystery Parables, *‘Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father’* (**Matthew 13:43**).”

Brothers and sisters, we **are** *“light in the Lord.”* If His light does not consciously fill us it is **only** because the “eyes of our understanding” have not been opened to receive it.

Brothers and sisters, our new identity in Christ calls for a new lifestyle! Paul says, *“Walk as children of light,”* or *“Live like children of light.”* Since God is light, and light exposes, to walk or live as children of light means that we live our lives **Coram Deo**, “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**). And since God is light, we as His children are to walk in a manner that reveals Him to a world that is lost in spiritual darkness.

In **Colossians 1:13** Paul writes, *“He [God] delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of the Son he loves”* (**New**

**English Translation**). Since this is the case, it is now incumbent on us to continually walk in the light into which we have been transferred.

The **Message** translates **2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1** in the following way:

*14 Don't become partners with those who reject God. How can you make a partnership out of right and wrong? That's not partnership; that's war. **Is light best friends with dark?***

*15 Does Christ go strolling with the Devil? Do trust and mistrust hold hands?*

*16 Who would think of setting up pagan idols in God's holy Temple? But that is exactly what we are, each of us a temple in whom God lives. God himself put it this way: "I'll live in them, move into them; I'll be their God and they'll be my people."*

*17 So leave the corruption and compromise; leave it for good," says God. "Don't link up with those who will pollute you. I want you all for myself."*

*18 I'll be a Father to you; you'll be sons and daughters to me." The Word of the Master, God.*

*1 With promises like this to pull us on, dear friends, let's make a clean break with everything that defiles or distracts us, both within and without. Let's make our entire lives fit and holy temples for the worship of God.*

My beloved brothers and sisters, if we are truly born again, we are "*children of light.*" **But our position is not a guarantee that we will live that way consistently.** And so Paul exhorts us, saying in essence, "You are now children of light. See to it that you live consistently in the light. Do not live in such a manner as to be mistaken for children of darkness. Regulate your life, conduct yourself, in the sphere of light and not of darkness. Keep walking in the light, step by step, each step

bringing you closer to conformity with the Son of God who is the “Light of the world” making progress.”

The Greek word translated “*children*” is **teknon**, which literally means “a born one” and refers to a child as viewed in relation to the one who bore him or her. In the context of this verse the One who bore us is God the Father. The word **teknon** takes on special theological significance when the Bible calls believers the “children of God.” God’s spiritual children possess His divine nature—the nature of light. Light describes the essence of the Father (**1 John 1:5**). The Children of a God whose very essence is light, should manifest a “family resemblance” and be light themselves!

Our Lord expects all of His disciples to be light. In **Matthew 5:14-16** He says,

*14 You are the light of the world. A city located on a hill cannot be hidden.*

*15 People do not light a lamp and put it under a basket but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.*

*16 In the same way, let your light shine before people, so that they can see your good deeds and give honor to your Father in heaven.*

**(New English Translation)**

In **1 Thessalonians 5:1-11**, Paul writes the following to the believers in Thessalonica:

*1 Now on the topic of times and seasons, brothers and sisters, you have no need for anything to be written to you.*

*2 For you know quite well that the day of the Lord will come in the same way as a thief in the night.*

3 Now when they are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction comes on them, like labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will surely not escape.

4 But you, brothers and sisters, are not in the darkness for the day to overtake you like a thief would.

5 For you all are **sons of the light and sons of the day**. We are **not of the night nor of the darkness**.

6 So then we must not sleep as the rest, but must stay alert and sober.

7 For those who sleep, sleep **at night** and those who get drunk are drunk **at night**.

8 **But since we are of the day, we must stay sober** by putting on the breastplate of faith and love and as a helmet our hope for salvation.

9 For God did not destine us for wrath but for gaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

10 He died for us so that whether we are alert or asleep we will come to life together with him.

11 Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, just as you are in fact doing.

**(New English Translation)**

The story is told of a man returning from a journey who brought his wife a matchbox that would glow in the dark. After giving the matchbox to her, his wife turned out the light, but the matchbox could not be seen. It did not glow in the darkness. Both the man and his wife thought they had been cheated. Then the wife noticed some French words on the box and asked a friend to translate them. The inscription said: **“If you want me to shine in the night, keep me in the light.”**

Brothers and sisters, we need to spend time alone with Jesus — the “*Light of the world*”— exposing our lives to His presence so that His image, His character, His light, may be transmitted to us. If we want to shine in the night, let us keep ourselves in the light of Jesus Christ.

We close with the words of a hymn that **Nellie Talbot** wrote for her Sunday school students, over one hundred and fifty years ago:

*Jesus wants me for a sunbeam,  
To shine for Him each day;  
In every way try to please Him,  
At home, at school, at play.*

*A sunbeam, a sunbeam,  
Jesus wants me for a sunbeam;  
A sunbeam, a sunbeam,  
I'll be a sunbeam for Him.*

*Jesus wants me to be loving,  
And kind to all I see;  
Showing how pleasant and happy  
His little one can be.*

*I will ask Jesus to help me  
To keep my heart from sin,  
Ever reflecting His goodness,  
And always shine for Him.*

*I'll be a sunbeam for Jesus;  
I can if I but try;  
Serving Him moment by moment,  
Then live with Him on high.*