

Ephesians 5:1-14 (NIV)

Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children ² and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

³ But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. ⁴ Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. ⁵ For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.^[a] ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. ⁷ Therefore do not be partners with them.

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 It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. ¹³ But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. ¹⁴ This is why it is said:

“Wake up, sleeper,
rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”

Footnotes:

- a. [Ephesians 5:5](#) Or *kingdom of the Messiah and God*

Ephesians 5:1-14 (HCSB)

5 Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children. ² And walk in love, as the Messiah also loved us and gave Himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God. ³ But sexual immorality and any impurity or greed should not even be heard of^[a] among you, as is proper for saints. ⁴ Coarse and foolish talking or crude joking are not suitable, but rather giving thanks. ⁵ For know and recognize this: Every sexually immoral or impure or greedy person, who is an idolater, does not have an inheritance in the kingdom of the Messiah and of God.

Light versus Darkness

⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty arguments, for God's wrath is coming on the disobedient because of these things.^[b] ⁷ Therefore, do not become their partners. ⁸ For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light— ⁹ for the fruit of the light^[c] results in all goodness, righteousness, and truth— ¹⁰ discerning what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Don't participate in the fruitless works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to mention what is done by them in secret. ¹³ Everything exposed by the light is made clear, ¹⁴ for what makes everything clear is light. Therefore it is said:

Get up, sleeper, and rise up from the dead,
and the Messiah will shine on you.^[d]

Footnotes:

- a. [Ephesians 5:3](#) Or *be named*
- b. [Ephesians 5:6](#) Lit *sons of disobedience*
- c. [Ephesians 5:9](#) Other mss read *fruit of the Spirit*
- d. [Ephesians 5:14](#) This poem may have been an early Christian hymn based on several passages in Isaiah; [Is 9:2](#); [26:19](#); [40:1](#); [51:17](#); [52:1](#); [60:1](#).

Holman Christian Standard Bible - Study Bible¹
Ephesians 5:1-14

5:1 Believers are challenged to **be imitators of God**. Previously they had been urged to learn about Christ ([4:20-21](#)) and not to grieve the Spirit ([4:30](#)). Believers cannot imitate God in power, knowledge, or presence, but they can imitate Him in self-sacrifice and in manifesting a forgiving spirit ([4:32](#)).

5:3-5 All of God's gifts, including sexuality in the bonds of marriage, are to be subjects for thanksgiving, not of **crude joking**.

5:6-7 Viewed actively, God's **wrath** is His firm, ongoing opposition to evil; He is eternally opposed to everything that is contrary to His design and His holy nature. God's new community is to reflect the character of God's Kingdom and the character of God's wrath by presenting a witness against evil.

5:10 **Discerning what is pleasing to the Lord** makes duty and Christian living a delight, investing service with joy.

5:11-14 Faithful believers do more than abstain from evil; they denounce the deeds of darkness as unfruitful, shameful, and not worthwhile.

1. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., *HCSB Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Ephesians 5".

English Standard Version - Study Bible²
Ephesians 5:1-14

5:1-20 New Life in Love. After a two-verse transitional section, Paul gives general instructions for holy living. He focuses on purity of life—both by avoiding evil deeds and associations and by adopting holy practices. [Verse 21](#) connects, [vv. 1-20](#) with [vv. 22-6:9](#).

5:1-2 Exhortation to Self-Sacrificial Love. Paul's discussion of love serves also as an introduction to further instructions on holy living ([vv. 3-20](#)). **imitators.** Believers are to imitate God's holiness in all of their conduct. They are to be like him, not as slaves trying to earn a wage but as **children**—and **beloved** children at that! **loved.** The past tense does not suggest that Christ has *stopped* loving us but only that, when he **gave himself up for us**, it was the supreme act of his love (see [John 15:13](#)).

5:3-20 Instruction in Holy Living. Paul gives general instructions on how Christians are to lead holy lives. He centers on wisdom in speech, sexual purity, associations, and other similar aspects of a thankful life.

5:3 sexual immorality. This general term (Gk. *porneia*) covers all sexual sins, including adultery, fornication, homosexuality, etc. **Covetousness** is a jealous longing for what others possess ([Ex. 20:17](#)), and it amounts to idolatry ([Eph. 5:5](#); [Col. 3:5](#)). **named.** Christians must be careful to guard their integrity and public reputation because public sins dishonor God, who has chosen them to be holy (see note on [Eph. 1:4](#)). **saints.** See note on [1:1](#).

5:4 Thanksgiving, in contrast to **crude joking** and **foolish talk**, is the positive way to speak, and it also counteracts covetousness (see [v. 3](#)). The way to avoid coveting others' possessions is to concentrate with thanks upon the good things the Lord has given (see [vv. 19-20](#)).

5:5 idolater. Covetousness places one's ultimate allegiance in the acquisition of the possessions of others, which often leads to other grave sins (e.g., [1 Kings 21:1-19](#)). Paul says this is tantamount to idolatry (see also [Col. 3:5](#)). **inheritance.** See [Eph. 1:13-14](#); [4:30](#). **kingdom.** Paul speaks of Christ ruling now from the right hand of God (see [1:20-22](#); cf. [Rom. 8:34](#); [1 Cor. 15:24-27](#); [Col. 3:1](#); etc.). Believers have already been brought into his redemptive kingdom (see [Eph. 2:6](#); [Col. 1:13-14](#)), although it will be consummated only at his second coming ([1 Cor. 15:20-24](#); [2 Tim. 4:1](#)). For Paul the kingdom of God in its fullness is the eternal realm that believers will finally and fully enter through resurrection immortality ([1 Cor. 15:50](#); [1 Thess. 2:12](#)), but it should also be experienced in some measure now in this age, through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit ([Rom. 14:17](#)).

5:6 deceive you... because of these things. A common deception throughout church history has been the notion that professing Christians can lead unrepentant, sinful lives after conversion to Christ (see [2 Tim. 3:1-9](#); [2 Pet. 2:1-3](#); [Rev. 2:14, 20](#)) and not suffer the consequences. But these practices lead to **the wrath of God** in judgment (e.g., [Rev. 2:21-23](#)). **sons of disobedience.** This Hebrew-inspired phrase describes people who habitually live in disobedient sin without repentance and thereby prove themselves to be children of the devil (see note on [Eph. 2:2](#); also [John 8:44](#); [1 John 3:10](#)), like Judas, "the son of destruction" ([John 17:12](#)).

5:7 become partners. Paul is not telling Christians to avoid all contact with nonbelievers but to avoid joining with them in their sin.

2. Lane T. Dennis, ed., *ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Ephesians 5".

5:8 Walk as children of light. See [1 John 1:5-7](#). Cf. also [Ps. 27:1](#); [Isa. 9:2](#); [42:6](#); [49:6](#); [John 9:5](#); [Acts 13:47](#); [26:18](#).

5:9 Fruit of light is similar to fruit of the Spirit (cf. [Gal. 5:22-23](#)).

5:10 The Bible gives general principles for life, but followers of Christ must use wisdom to **discern** how to apply those principles to the concrete issues of their lives. The book of Proverbs is of great help in this regard. Such wisdom may be defined as “the skill of godly living,” which one must thoughtfully discern, apply, and practice in order to live in a way that **is pleasing to the Lord**.

5:11 Expose means either to reprove or to convince through argument and discussion (also [v. 13](#)), at the same time taking great care not to gossip or to slander others. Instead, Christians should show by their lives and their wise interactions that the **works of darkness** are not to be ignored among God’s holy people.

5:14 it says. The quotation is not of any one OT passage but is probably a combined reference to several places, especially in Isaiah: “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you” ([Isa. 60:1](#); see [9:2](#); [26:19](#)).

NLT Life Application Study Bible³

Ephesians 5:1-14

5:1, 2 Just as children imitate their parents, we should follow God's example. His great love for us led him to sacrifice himself so that we might live. Our love for others should be of the same kind—a love that goes beyond affection to self-sacrificing service.

5:4 Obscene stories and coarse jokes are so common that we begin to take them for granted. Paul cautions, however, that improper language should have no place in the Christian's conversation because it does not reflect God's gracious presence in us. How can we praise God and remind others of his goodness when we are speaking coarsely?

5:5-7 Paul does not forbid all contact with unbelievers. Jesus taught his followers to befriend sinners and lead them to him ([Luke 5:30-32](#)). Instead, Paul writes against the lifestyle of people who make excuses for bad behavior and recommend its practice to others—whether they are in the church or outside of it. Such people quickly pollute the church and endanger its unity and purpose. We must befriend unbelievers if we are to lead them to Christ, but we must be wary of those who are viciously evil, immoral, or opposed to all that Christianity stands for. Such people are more likely to influence us for evil than we are to influence them for good.

5:8 As people who have light from the Lord, our actions should reflect our faith. We should live above reproach morally so that we will reflect God's goodness to others. Jesus stressed this truth in the Sermon on the Mount ([Matthew 5:15, 16](#)).

5:10-14 It is important to avoid the "worthless deeds of evil and darkness" (any pleasure or activity that results in sin), but we must go even further. Paul instructs us to expose these deeds, because our silence may be interpreted as approval. God needs people who will take a stand for what is right. Christians must lovingly speak out for what is true and right.

5:14 This is not a direct quote from Scripture but was probably taken from a hymn well known to the Ephesians. The hymn seems to have been based on [Isaiah 26:19](#); [51:17](#); [52:1](#); [60:1](#); and [Malachi 4:2](#). Paul was appealing to the Ephesians to wake up and realize the dangerous condition into which some of them had been slipping.

3. *Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 2007.

Life Essentials Study Bible⁴

**A Principle to Live By
Ephesians #12: Walking in the Light**

from Ephesians 5:6-14

**Because of our new life in Christ,
we are to illuminate the darkness created by sin.**

These believers who once lived in “darkness,” particularly in sexually immoral relationships, were to now “walk” among unbelievers as “children of light” ([v. 8](#)). They were to obey Jesus Christ, who had taught His disciples that they “are the light of the world” (cp. [Mt 5:14](#) with [Eph 4:20-21](#)).

Jesus modeled this great truth:

I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows Me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life. ([Jn 8:12](#))

Jesus made this declaration following His encounter with the hypocritical men who had brought Him a woman they had caught in the act of adultery. They themselves were guilty of the very same sin, illustrating that it was not only the Gentiles who were walking in darkness ([Eph 2:3](#); [Rm 2:17-24](#)). (See 2Sm #8: Ongoing Moral Failure, [p. 403](#).)

Reflection and Response

In what specific ways are some professing Christians today failing to walk as children of light?

4. Gene Getz, *Life Essentials Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2011), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1632.