

# “Now You Are Salt And Light!” (Ephesians 5:8–14)

If you read the inscriptions on the gravestones in a cemetery, you will be given brief biographies of the ones buried there. Some of the more common inscriptions in America say, “She was a good mother”; “Sainted father gone to heaven”; “Faithful Father, Beloved Husband.” Some gravestones have longer epitaphs. In one cemetery, the grave of a little girl was found. Chiseled into the granite marker for the girl’s grave were these words: “A child of whom her playmates said, ‘It was easier to be good when she was with us.’” This brief comment on the little girl’s example illustrates how critical it is for Christians to maintain a good influence.

As a Christian, you now have the most powerful influence for good that you have ever possessed! The Lord referred to this power by saying, “You are the salt of the earth; . . . You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:13, 14a). Ignoring the power of one’s influence is a foolish oversight. The Christian is expected to utilize the new power of personal influence to glorify God. Ephesians 5:8–14 discusses this godly influence.

Look at this section of Ephesians, and discover the urgency of developing the appropriate influence. The Scriptures state that those who follow God must be good examples to help those in the world find the blessings of salvation. You are now God’s possession; therefore, you must maintain a godly influence.

## THE DUTY (5:8)

The heathen religions taught that one lacked understanding until an “Oracle” revealed cer-

tain mysteries of life. Those who claimed to have been given revelations by the Oracles were called “enlightened ones.” They believed that their minds, once darkened, had been enlightened with knowledge. Others seeking to understand life’s perplexities sought the counsel of those “enlightened ones.”

Paul identified Christians as the truly enlightened ones. The members of the church in Ephesus had once lived in darkness, but their condition changed when they turned from darkness to light. They did this by hearing, understanding, believing, and obeying the gospel (Acts 26:14–19; Colossians 1:13). When one chooses to leave the darkness for the light, that choice requires him to live in a drastically different way. Consequently, the Christian refuses to live according to his old ways and avoids various types of people (5:7); instead, he now lives in a manner that is characterized by “light.”

The duty of displaying a godly influence is embodied in the phrase “children of Light.” Those who have obeyed God’s commands have not only left a world of darkness for a world of light, but have actually become light (John 8:12). The Christian is becoming an imitator of God and is expected to avoid all darkness (1 John 1:5).

This astonishing change from darkness to light is evidence of genuine conversion. The story is told of a traveler in China who asked a villager if he had ever heard the gospel preached. The villager replied, “No, I have never heard the gospel preached, but I have seen it. In another village there was a man who was the terror of his

neighborhood. He had a violent temper. He was an opium smoker, a criminal, and a dangerous man. But the gospel changed him. He became gentle and good. He no longer smokes opium. No, I've never heard the gospel; but I have seen it, and it is very good!"

Every Christian is required to display the amazing change that comes through conversion. The Bible's statement is straightforward: "Walk as children of Light." You are expected to live in a way that reveals you are truly a child of the heavenly Father, in whom "there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). How does your influence offer evidence that you are now among the "children of Light"?

### **THE TRAITS (5:9)**

While there is no question that Christians are expected to live as "children of Light," some may not fully grasp what is involved in fulfilling this duty. By inspiration, Paul listed ways to nurture and protect Christian influence.

*First, practice goodness.* This trait definitely describes the kind of influence that Christians should maintain. "Goodness" is a virtue that emphasizes kindness and helpfulness. A person who is known for his goodness is full of positive thoughts and attitudes; he always does good deeds. His good heart causes him to practice good behavior. How should the Christian's conduct cause him to be filled with goodness? He should treat everyone with kindness and justice. He will not take advantage of anyone, and he will defend those who are being oppressed by others. Practicing goodness involves discipline, rebuke, and instruction, as well as love, consideration, and help. The one controlled by goodness will not agree with evil or allow evil to go unrebuked. He will do whatever he can to stop evil.

*Second, pattern righteousness.* "Righteousness" implies that a person *is* right and that he *does* right. The Christian's influence is governed by righteousness in such a way that he continues to be in a right relationship with God and continues to live righteously by doing what God expects. Righteousness is controlled by faith (Romans 4:1-3, 22; 5:1). As an individual comes to faith in God and obeys God's commands, he is "created in righteousness" (Ephesians 4:23, 24).

A heart filled with righteousness helps him to maintain the proper influence because he desires to be right and to do what is right. Whenever he is confronted with a moral or ethical choice in life, righteousness reminds him to ask, "Is it right with God? Is it the right thing to do?"

*Third, pursue truth.* The Christian's influence is proper because he follows absolute truth. The world uses lies and deception. The ungodly do not want to accept the fact that truth is absolute. Those who know God recognize that truth exists and that truth remains the same. The Christian must be careful to remain consistent in his influence, or else he is not following truth. Many will seek to follow truth as long as it is convenient or comfortable. Sometimes, when people begin to realize that the truth of God is contrary to what they want to do, they become upset. A godly influence belongs to the Christian who carefully and consistently follows truth.

Since you are a Christian now, you have the duty to become "light" and "salt" to the world. Your influence is to be used to help others understand God's Word and obey His commands. How can you accomplish this? By practicing goodness and righteousness and following truth in all of your choices and actions!

### **THE PROCEDURE (5:10)**

The duty of the Christian to demonstrate the appropriate influence is stated in 5:8. Now we are told exactly how to do this. As we are presented with choices in life, we must choose what is best for "children of Light" to do.

The word Paul used to describe how the Christian makes choices in life is translated as "trying to learn." The Greek term is translated in other places as "proving" or "approving" (see Romans 14:22; 1 Corinthians 16:3). The Christian guards his influence by thinking, evaluating, and testing the choices to determine what the Lord would have him to do.

You must learn to protect your Christian influence. The Bible has given you knowledge of the absolute truth of God. However, God's Word teaches principles; it does not free you from your responsibility to think about a situation and choose the godly option!

You will have to make decisions regarding what to do, what to say, how to dress, where to go, and with whom to associate. Why? Because your influence depends upon such choices! You are no longer walking in darkness; you are now a child of Light, and your choices will affect your influence. Your decisions are not made to please self or others (Galatians 1:10), but to please the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:9; Philippians 4:18; Colossians 1:10). You are to walk as a child of Light because you know that in doing so you will please God.

### **THE CONFLICT (5:11, 12)**

It will not always be easy to protect your reputation. Satan will do everything he can to persuade you to make choices that may compromise your influence. That is why Paul urged Christians to avoid certain people and practices (1 Corinthians 15:33; 1 Timothy 6:3–21).

The Christian's influence is to be strong enough that it will "expose" the darkness of sin. Too many Christians have remained silent and allowed the dark deeds of sin to go unchallenged. So bold is sin that even the most shameful practices are often discussed publicly, and not a word of reproof is ever spoken! The boldness of sin often intimidates the Christian, whose influence is then weakened by silence. To counter this kind of timidity, Paul wrote, "For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord" (2 Timothy 1:7, 8a).

One of the greatest temptations for Christians comes in the area of participation with those who can compromise his or her influence. The Christian is obligated to stay away from activities that are associated with "darkness" and not "light." "Darkness" feels uncomfortable when exposed by "light" (John 3:19, 20). The Christian never enhances his influence by deciding to "participate" with those who are doing things that are "disgraceful."

By becoming a Christian, you have joined in the conflict between light and darkness. Resolve to remain strong and not cower when you are confronted by darkness. Let your light shine! The story is told of a young man who enlisted in the army. It was his custom to read his Bible

each night and then bow in prayer. On his first night in the barracks, he was in a dilemma. He was surrounded by soldiers who were cursing and joking about immorality. He knew they would ridicule him if he began reading his Bible and then prayed. He decided that he would leave the barracks and find a secret place to read and pray. He then realized that such a decision would not be pleasing to God. Instead, he quietly went to his bed, sat down, opened his Bible, and then prayed. Silence fell in the barracks, and all eyes were looking at him. Afterwards, some ridicule was spoken and some mocked him, but the young man decided he would not stop. The next night he did the same thing, and less ridicule was spoken. Within six months, others were reading their Bibles and praying before going to sleep. Over a period of time, those who had ridiculed the man the most were willing to fight for him because they respected him.

Yes, conflict will come into your life as you make choices to please the Lord. Do not allow the conflict to compromise your influence!

### **THE AGGRESSIVENESS (5:13, 14)**

The Christian's influence must help to enlighten others about truth, righteousness, and goodness. He must not be silent because he is obligated to be a force in his culture. Salt and light would be useless if they had no power to influence their environment!

Godly influence is to be aggressive, working to "expose" evils and "awake[n]" the unsuspecting who are involved in sinful deeds. Christians can find wonderful satisfaction by influencing the world so that good results!

Now that you are a Christian, you possess a fantastic influence. Through your choices of where to go, what to do, how to speak, and how to choose associates, you show those living in darkness the blessings of walking in the light. Your example will bring joy and thanksgiving into the lives of many because of your trusting faith in God (1 Thessalonians 1:2–10).

### **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

Ephesians 5:8–14 is filled with cautions for the Christian. You must be careful to guard your influence. In fact, 5:16 urges extreme caution.

Through careless living, you could lose your impact upon the world.

The Christian who does not guard his influence will be embarrassed. Illustrating this tragedy is a comical story of a professional boxer from the 1930s in the United States. His name was C. D. Blalock. His name is not instantly recognized, as are the names of some other professional boxers, but Blalock's performance in the boxing ring will never be forgotten. Blalock stepped into the ring with another boxer, and the contest began. In that match, one of the strangest moments in boxing history occurred. Blalock swung to hit his opponent, but the other boxer dodged the blow. Blalock missed his opponent and hit himself. As everyone watched, Blalock staggered and then fell. He became the only prizefighter in history to score a knockout against himself!<sup>1</sup>

How tragic it is when Christians allow their decisions to do to their influence what Blalock did to himself! Some choose such lifestyles that their impact for good is knocked powerless. This could happen because of an uncontrolled temper, rash words, vulgar language habits, uncontrolled passions, worldly pursuits, or any number of other improper practices. Remember that, as a Christian, you have been sanctified as God's own possession. Therefore, you are to demonstrate goodness, righteousness, and truthfulness. Beware of the danger of living so that your influence loses its impact for good (1 Corinthians 9:26, 27).

Through your Christian influence, you have the power to help others see the light of God's truth. By setting a good example, you can lead

another person to escape the darkness of sin. Look at your personal influence very critically. Who will be in heaven because of your example?

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## Spiritual Fitness

Exercise is important to spiritual growth, just as exercise is important to physical growth. Suppose a person decided that he would lie down on his bed and not get up anymore. Before long, he would be unable to get out of bed. For growth to happen, exercise is necessary. In Hebrews 5:12, 13, the writer was addressing people who had been Christians long enough that they should have been teaching others. However, they had not grown spiritually. They were still babies in need of milk and not meat. He went on to say, "But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil" (5:14).

As we live the new life in Christ, we have experiences that give us opportunities to exercise our faith. These include speaking words of encouragement, living right, and serving others' needs. That kind of exercise prompts spiritual growth. Of course, spiritual growth is a gradual process. It does not happen overnight; it happens one step at a time.

A child sometimes likes to be measured to find out how tall he is. His mother or father may mark his height on a wall. Then he wants to be measured again in the next month to learn how much he has grown. We cannot see a child's growth day by day; but as the weeks pass, new marks are made higher and higher on the wall. The growth is gradual, but it is happening. In the same way, our growth in Christ is gradual, but it is happening.

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<sup>1</sup>Zig Ziglar, "Behaviors Bring Nothing but Grief and Turmoil," *Pecos Enterprise, Opinion* [article on-line]; available from <http://www.pecos.net/news/arch97a/071697o.htm>; Internet; accessed 19 November 2003.