

This Great Mystery

Session 8. Walk as Children of Light

You are not people trying to reach the light; you are light in the Lord, so walk like it.

What We Found

Paul's biggest command, 'be imitators of God,' turned out to rest on identity: 'as beloved children.' Children carry the family resemblance because of who they already are, and the imitation Paul means is walkable: love the way Christ loved, giving himself up for us. We chased his phrase 'a fragrant offering and sacrifice' back to Israel's altar and found that Paul describes the crucifixion as worship, a self-offering that rose to the Father and was received with delight.

Then the surprise at the center of the night: after listing impurity, coveting, and rotten speech, Paul names exactly one replacement for all of it. Thanksgiving. All those sins are ways of grabbing; gratitude is the trained posture of receiving, and the two cannot hold the same heart at once. His word is *eucharistia*, the very word the Church took for the Mass.

We watched the grammar of verse 8 do something no rulebook does: not 'you were in darkness' but 'you were darkness,' and not 'you are enlightened' but 'you are light in the Lord.' Light is what we are now, by gift and by participation, which is why the command is simply to walk as what we are. The line Paul quotes about the sleeper waking may be one of the oldest songs Christians ever sang, and its subject is what baptism did to every one of us.

The passage ended where it began: a community filled with the Spirit rather than with wine, singing, and giving thanks always and for everything. Thanksgiving opened the passage as the antidote and closed it as the atmosphere.

Voices of the Church

St. John Chrysostom, d. 407

Preaching through Ephesians, Chrysostom notices that Paul does not merely forbid filthy and foolish talk; he names its replacement. The mouth will be filled with something, and a tongue trained in thanksgiving has little room left for what is crude or cruel. For him, gratitude in every circumstance, in loss as much as in gain, is the surest sign of a soul that has understood the gospel. The tradition of the Church remembers that he died on a forced march into exile with thanksgiving still on his lips: glory to God for all things.

Homilies on Ephesians, on this passage. Summary of St. John Chrysostom's teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. For a generation whose speech is formed by group chats and comment sections, this lands hard: you do not fix a mouth by emptying it, you fix it by filling it with thanks.

St. Augustine of Hippo, d. 430

Augustine returns again and again to Paul's precision in this verse: the apostle does not say that you were in darkness but that you were darkness, and he does not say that you are now light, full stop, but light in the Lord. No soul is light by its own nature. In ourselves we are darkness; in the Lord we are light, the way a thing is bright only while it stands in the sun. Conversion, then, is not self-improvement achieved by effort but illumination received from Another, and holiness is not maintaining our own glow but remaining in him.

In substance, from his preaching on Ephesians 5:8 and his teaching on light by participation. Summary of St. Augustine of Hippo's teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. This frees the perfectionists in the room: the pressure to generate your own goodness is off, because the light was never yours to produce, only to stay in.

St. Ignatius of Loyola, d. 1556

When Ignatius taught his companions to examine their conscience each day, the first step he set was not a hunt for sins but thanksgiving: begin by giving thanks to God our Lord for the benefits received. Only after gratitude has done its work does the soul look at its failures, and even then in the light of gift rather than of dread. In his letters he went further, ranking ingratitude among the most abominable of sins and calling it, in substance, the origin of the rest.

Spiritual Exercises, the General Examination of Conscience; and his letters. Summary of St. Ignatius of Loyola's teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. This is Paul's counter-habit made into a daily practice: whatever you are fighting, the first move each night is to name the gifts.

Live It This Week

Practices

1. Each night this week, before any examination of conscience, name three concrete gifts from the day and thank God for them out loud. St. Ignatius made thanksgiving the first step of the examen: gratitude first, every time, then the honest look at failures.
2. Pick the one item from verses 3 and 4 that hooks you most: impurity, coveting, or cutting and crude speech. Every time you catch yourself at it this week, replace it on the spot with one specific thank-you to God.
3. Once this week, sing. Pray a psalm aloud, or put on sacred music while you drive or clean and actually sing along. Paul's Spirit-filled community is a singing community, and singing trains the heart faster than thinking does.
4. Paul's word for thanksgiving is the word the Church took for the Mass. Get to one weekday Mass this week if you can, or at Sunday Mass bring one named gift to offer silently at the offertory. If something tonight stirred the need, go to confession; the light is for walking in, not for hiding from.

Scripture Memory

Ephesians 5:8

"for once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light"

Ephesians 5:8

Ready Response

A friend says: Christianity is just a purity code designed to make you ashamed of your body. Using tonight's passage, how would you answer in a sentence or two?

Paul's word to us was not 'be ashamed' but 'you are light'; the demand flows from a dignity, not a disgust.

And his replacement for impurity was not repression but thanksgiving: you fight grabbing by learning to receive everything, including people, as gift.

Go Further in the Catechism

- CCC 1216. The early Church called baptism enlightenment: the baptized become sons of light.
- CCC 1265. Baptism makes a new creature: adopted child of God, member of Christ, temple of the Spirit.
- CCC 1328. The sacrament is called Eucharist because it is an action of thanksgiving to God.
- CCC 2638. Every event and every need can become an offering of thanksgiving.

Before next session. Read Ephesians 5:21-33 before we meet. And dig out anything you wrote down for your sealed My Guess from Session 1: next session, we open them.