



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Ephesians 5: 3-14

Winter 2023-24

"Sleepers Awake"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Joe, and good morning. That was a fitting text for our text in Ephesians chapter 5, verses 3-14. This is the section of Scripture where Paul is applying the doctrines that he gave in chapters 1-3; to the daily walk—the Christian life.

And he continues that in our text, beginning with verse 3,

<sup>3</sup> But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; <sup>4</sup> and *there must be no* filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. <sup>5</sup> For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

<sup>6</sup> Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. <sup>7</sup> Therefore do not be partakers with them; <sup>8</sup> for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light <sup>9</sup> (for the fruit of the Light *consists* in all goodness and righteousness and truth), <sup>10</sup> trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. <sup>11</sup> Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; <sup>12</sup> for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. <sup>13</sup> But all things become

visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. <sup>14</sup> For this reason it says,

“Awake, sleeper,  
And arise from the dead,  
And Christ will shine on you.”

Ephesians 5: 3-14

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study in it together. Let's bow together in a word of prayer.

Father, again, it's a great privilege to be here with Your people. And every Sunday, when you're my age, LORD, seems to come more quickly every week. And it's a reminder that time is passing. But what a blessing to have it pass in this way, and be able to be with Your people, the saints, doing what we're doing—which is a great thing, we're opening Your Word, Your inerrant Word, (as Mike put it in his lesson this morning more than once), the inspired Word.

This is God breathed; the text that we've read and everything from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22, it is God breathed. It is the work of the Spirit of God, and we have the privilege of studying this unique book. No book of literature can compare with it. This is Your Word—and it's effective. And as we read it and study it, it will have its effect upon us. And we pray for that, LORD; may You change us through the time we spend together this morning. May the Spirit of God take this and apply it to our souls, strengthen us, enliven us, wake us up; and give us the desire to follow You, to walk by the Spirit, to live a life that's honoring to the Triune God—and that is most healthy for each and every one of us. Well, we look to You to bless us, LORD; that's Your work, and we ask You to perform it, and bring about some change in our life this morning. Strengthen us.

That's spiritual blessing; we also pray for the material needs Your people have, as well. And there are so many others, LORD, who aren't here, who'd like to be here, who are dealing with various physical ailments. Heal them and encourage them. And for

those of us that are in good health right now, we give You thanks. It's a gift from You. We live in a dangerous world. The air is full of 'stuff', and yet You protect us all the time. We thank You for that. We thank You for this time together. Bless us now, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

Elizabeth is now going to begin our study with a familiar piece of music.

*[Sleeper's Awake played on the piano.]*

*(Message)* Thank you, Elizabeth. I almost forgot I have to preach. *[Laughter]* That piece is one of Johann Sebastian Bach's best known and beautiful pieces; *Sleepers Awake*. And what a pleasant piece of music to wake up to every morning.

Actually, that's not its purpose. The whole arrangement is a choral piece, it's a hymn, and beautiful as it is, it is intended to arouse the saints from spiritual indifference to watchfulness, to vigilance and preparation. We find this call to 'Awake!' all through the Bible. In the prophets of the Old Testament, in the parables of the Gospels, and in Paul's epistle to the Ephesians. It's how Paul ends our passage this morning, "Awake sleeper." (vs14b).

That's the portion of the book, (this is, as I said at the beginning, as we read through it this morning), where Paul's instruction is given on Christian duty, on Christian behavior, on how we are to walk in this world. In the previous verse, Paul told the Ephesians to "walk in love". And he explained that as '*self-sacrifice*'.

Well now in verse 3, Paul turns from urging self-sacrifice to warning against self-indulgence. He begins in verse 3 by warning against *immorality* and avarice, sex, and greed. *Immorality*, the Greek word for that, that's used here, is *porneia*—and you get a sense of the seriousness of that word in that warning, because we get our word, *pornography*, from it. In fact, the New Testament scholar, F. F. Bruce, criticized translations of this word with words like *immorality*, or *unchastity*. He said, "Those translations are 'mealy mouthed'. It's much stronger—it's *fornication*." The great city of

Ephesus offered citizens and visitors lots of opportunity for that with its brothels and pagan temples—like the temple of Diana, one of ‘the Seven Wonders of the World’, with its ritual prostitution.

But Paul informed the Ephesians that such conduct is not proper among saints—among ‘sanctified ones’. In fact, he wrote that that these vices, “must not even be named among you.” (vs3b). Now you might think, ‘Well, of course not! Obviously, fornication, visiting brothels, immoral behavior of any kind is absolutely forbidden! It would seem to go without saying.’

But it was not so obvious in the Gentile world, of which Ephesus was a big part. This was common behavior, and largely accepted among them, (as it really, has become in our own post Christian, neo-pagan world). It's a very easy thing to become accustomed to bad behavior when surrounded by it, and become tolerant of it—even accepting of it.

The English poet, Alexander Pope, had an insightful line in his, *An Essay On Man*. He wrote, "Vice is a monster of such frightful mean that to be hated needs but to be seen. But seen too oft, familiar with her face, we first endure, then pity, then embrace."

American has embraced the “*monster*”. These warnings are as much for us today as they were for the saints two millennia ago. As Paul will warn, "Sleepers awake", because it's easy to drift, it's easy to fall asleep, it's easy to conform.

Well this leads on to other vices to avoid. Verse 4, "And there must be no filthiness and silly talk or coarse jesting, which are not fitting." Paul was not condemning humor or jokes, rather, he was censoring off color humor, and flippant conversations, (Leon Morris indicated that, ‘Ephesus had a reputation for that’). I suppose it did, but the whole world has a reputation for that. And because of that, since it is so common in those around us, we should pray David's prayer given in Psalm 141, verse 3, "Set a guard ...over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips."

But typical of Paul, he follows up his prohibition with positive counsel. That's always, really, the best solution to bad habits—replace them with good habits: 'Fill the vacuum with something edifying instead of practicing coarse jesting'. Paul's alternative is, 'giving thanks.' (vs4b). That's a good alternative. Christians have much to be thankful for: From eternal life to our daily bread.

Everything that we have is a gift from God. Every breath you take, as Daniel told King Belshazzar that night of his banquet, (the last night of his life, with just a few moments left to live), that, 'God, who he dishonored, is the one who has in His hand every breath you take.' (Dan 5:23). Everything about our life, every moment of our existence, is a gift of the sovereign God. And so we should be men and women who are thankful every moment. That should be our attitude—and if it is, it will affect our speech for the good.

Now all of this says something about people. Conduct and conversation reveals a person's character and spiritual condition—a person's eternal destiny. Paul says that plainly in verse 5. "For this you know with certainty...", ('you know this with certainty' he said), "...that no immoral...", (again, that's that word *porneia*, 'this pornos here'), "...or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God."

Obviously, an idolater is excluded from Christ's kingdom; he or she worships a false god. And all three vices here are forms of idolatry. Paul states that in Colossians chapter 3, verse 5, where he calls "greed"—"idolatry". It's idolatry because greed gives the acquisition of things, (money, possessions), first place in a person's life—makes it a god—and worships it.

That's the same with *immorality*. A person who pursues pleasure, who lives a self-indulgent life without repentance, who is characterized by unclean behavior, shows no sign of new life. A person who is not born again does not have an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. That's the clear teaching of Scripture: John 3, verse 3, "Jesus answered and said to him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot

see the kingdom of God.' " That's grace, that's *free grace*. No one can earn the kingdom of God. It's all of God through His gracious power of regeneration, being "born again."

But a new life will manifest itself in both speech and conduct; that's what Paul was telling the Ephesians. Now, of course, he didn't mean that Christians do not sin or do not fall into serious sin, or even languish in sin for a period of time. A great example of that is David. Mike's (*Black*), teaching on David; and we're in those early years of David's life...he's about to slay the giant; this is amazing thing that takes place. And later he becomes King of Israel, the greatest King of Israel...but he fell into sin. Even David fell into sin—and languished in that sin for a while. He wrote of that in Psalm 32.

We do, too. We struggle, spiritually, every day...*every day*. That's the teaching of Scripture. That's the teaching of Romans 7, verses 14-25, where Paul gives the struggle of his spiritual life; the apostle Paul, 'not doing the things that he wants to do, and those he should do.' It's Galatians 5, verses 16-21, again, the war between the flesh and the spirit. It's constant. It's always going on so that you cannot do what you wish, or what you want. It's constant, and we often succumb to the flesh—but we repent daily; and we fight daily.

Indifference to sin and the struggle is the danger. Maybe Paul had seen some of these things in Ephesus. Now he's in Rome and in jail, in prison; maybe he'd heard of some drifting that was going on. Because it's always a problem, always the case, that we have to struggle against that, be aware of that—the struggle of conforming to the world, and not to Christ.

And so he gave this 'wake up call'; and in verse 6 he warned against, 'listening to anything different from his warnings'. Such "words", contrary to his, were "empty", he said, and designed to "deceive." They give false security. The result, or the consequence, is "the wrath of God". And someday, those who deny the need of grace, and the need of forgiveness; who accept sin, even encourage sin in others, will be swept away. In fact, "...the wrath of God (*presently*) abides on him" (or her), as John wrote in John 3, verse 36. Paul may have had that meaning in mind also, because the statement here is in

the *present* tense. It *comes*, wrath comes **now**. The effects of sin become evident in the person's life with the scars it leaves on the soul: It affects a person's thinking; it affects a person's behavior—it turns it bad, and worse.

But the full manifestation of wrath comes at the end of the age. So Paul wrote, in verse 7, "Do not be partakers with them." Meaning, 'Don't be fooled by their smooth words. Don't be taken in by them, and share their false ideas.' The destiny of the unbeliever is reason enough to avoid their conduct.

But Paul gave another reason in verse 8, (one that he's already been stressing)...and that is our *position*. A change has occurred in our lives as believers in Jesus Christ. We now have a new identity, "...for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light." (vs8). In other words, 'Behave according to the people that you actually are.'

But what immediately, I think, is striking about this statement, "*formerly*", that he makes in verse 8, (for he's made that same exhortation in chapter 2—and so we've heard that already), but what is striking to me here is the way he puts it: It's not, 'You were *formerly in* darkness', but, '...you were darkness'.

Darkness represents ignorance and evil. Satan's realm is called "the domain of darkness", in Colossians chapter 1, in verse 13. And before faith, we were not only part of that 'domain of darkness', we contributed to it; we contributed darkness to it. A person is either *darkness* or a person is *Light*. There's no neutrality. Those who are outside of Christ, who are in unbelief, are under the dominion of Satan.

That's how bad our situation was; and it was true of every one of us. We were all captives of Satan and darkness. But now, Paul wrote, "you are Light", (vs8), in the world. 'You were darkness. Now you are Light...That's grace.'

Paul wanted them to remember that; but also to remember that they, "are Light in the Lord", (vs8b), not apart from Him. In other words, 'our Light, our glory and truth, are borrowed.' He is like the sun, we are like the moon. The sun gives off light, the moon reflects light—it doesn't originate light; it depends on the sun for light.

And so it is with us—we have Christ's Light. Having been plucked out of darkness, we've been changed: We have been made new—we've been given understanding and new capacities so that we are adequate to reflect Christ's truth and Christ's character. And so Paul said, 'Do that!', "...walk as children of Light." (vs8c). 'It's what you are; it's something that you can do by His grace, so don't neglect it', he was saying. 'Shine in the midst of darkness.'

Now we do that in different degrees from one another, and from time to time. Less so in our youth and immaturity and more in our maturity—much like the moon. The moon has different phases at different times of the month. It might shine brightly at night, like a full moon, or partially as a half-moon. But the moon reflects the sun's light, and God has made us to reflect Christ—some more than others, but all are to shine.

And in verse 9, Paul gives some instruction on what that means—of what should be seen in us as we shine, "as children of Light"—the characteristics of the Christian life. And he speaks of it as "fruit", that's the product of the new life; "...for the fruit of Light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth".

Again, it is "fruit". These virtues are not the means to obtaining eternal life. They are the result, the natural result of having eternal life; and they develop increasingly as we grow, as we mature in that life.

Kent Hughes, in his commentary would count it, I think, as good illustration of this from the life of Corrie ten Boom. Her father was a watchmaker, and a very godly man. One day a wealthy man came into the shop to purchase an expensive watch, (and this was when times were tough, financially; it's during the Great Depression), and the amount of the purchase would have met all of the family needs.

So the man paid with cash; but while her father had the money in his hand the man began to explain why it was he was buying this expensive watch. And it was because Mr. ten Boom's young competitor down the street couldn't fix his old watch. So Mr. ten Boom asked to see it; he took the watch and he opened it up and made a few



adjustments, and then handed it back to the man and said, "There; that was a very little mistake. It will be fine now."

And then he said, "Sir, I trust the young watchmaker. Some day he will be as good as his father. So if you ever have a problem with his watch, his watches, whatever, come to me, I'll help you out. Now," he said, "I shall give you back your money and you return my watch."

Well, Corrie was watching all of this, and she wrote that, "She was horrified as she saw the exchange." As the rich man walked out the door, he walked out with the money in his pocket; and so, when the door closed, she gave her father a piece of her mind— only to be corrected by his patient response.

He looked over his steel rimmed glasses and asked, "Corrie, what do you think that young man would have said when he heard that one of his good customers had gone to Mr. ten Boom? Do you think that the name of the LORD would be honored? As for the money, trust the LORD, Corrie. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills, and He will take care of us."

Well I read that, I thought of Proverbs 22, verse 1, 'A good name is better than riches.' Maybe he had that on his mind, but I don't think so. I think that this response was simply, "the fruit of the Light", the natural response of one who's born again. Those who have a new nature are a new creation in Christ; and his chief end, and that of Mr. ten Boom's, was not so much to have a great name, but to glorify God and not indulge himself.

It's *natural*, I say, for a child of God. It's *natural* for one who's born again, who has a new nature. It's *natural*, but it develops through God's Word and the knowledge of the truth—the knowledge of Light. That's how faith grows—and through gentle correction, the kind that he gave to his daughter. And that moved her along in her faith and gave her spiritual growth. That's how saints grow: Through the Word of God, through the exhortations, through the admonitions of others.

And doesn't that demonstrate the vital value of doctrine? Specifically that of the absolute sovereignty of God, "...who...", Paul wrote in chapter 1 of this book, verse 11,

"...works all things according to the counsel of His will." If He doesn't, then you better worry...but He does. And because He does, He provides; He takes care of us. He may bring us to the very brink...but He'll provide. —Trust Him.

We do that as we live in His Light, as we live in His truth. The moon doesn't reflect the sun's light when it's out of the light, when the sun is on the other side of the earth and there is a lunar eclipse. When that sunlight is blocked the moon doesn't shine. So, live in the Lord's Light. That's Paul's counsel in verse 10: "...walk as children of Light", (vs8b), "...trying to *learn* what is pleasing to the Lord." (vs10).

The word for '*learn*' has the idea of, 'put to the test'. In other words, 'Don't accept teachings uncritically. Put things to the test but put what you *learn* to the test that it be true. Use good judgment.'

That requires a knowledge of Scripture; 'testing teaching with Scripture'. It's what the Bereans did. Go to Acts 17 and Paul goes to Berea, and they were these high minded, lofty minded people because everything he said they looked through the Scriptures to make sure it was so—and found that it was. Well, that's what Paul was urging here because whatever passes the test of Scripture is good. Whatever passes the test of Scripture is pleasing to the Lord.

Now, since we are to please the Lord, to live as Light and produce "the fruit of Light", it follows that we're to have nothing to do with darkness. Paul said that in verse 7, but he repeats it here in verse 11, "Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness..."

Note that Paul wrote of *avoiding* the deeds—not the *doers* of the deeds. Paul was not advocating separatism from the world. Christ didn't separate Himself from sinners. He was a friend of tax gatherers and sinners. He went where they were; He ate with them; He got to know them—and he was criticized by the Pharisees for doing it.

Their criticism amounted to guilt by association. But the Lord wasn't guilty of any 'deeds of darkness'. Nor did He support such deeds. He was pure and brought Light into

the darkness—and in doing that, exposed their sin by the purity of His life and the truth of His words. And the result was, many followed Him; all who were *called*, did.

And that's what we're to do. As we associate with people, they should see something different about us, something virtuous and uncompromising—not self-righteousness, but righteousness. They should see the life of Christ shining through us—and that life will expose their life.

J. B. Phillips paraphrased this, "Let your lives show by contrast how dreary and futile these things are." Now that's the idea, but not the whole of it. There are occasions that call for a verbal response, for saying that something is wrong and calling sin what it is. To ignore evil is to encourage it.

Sometimes we don't expose sin because we don't take it very seriously. Paul took it seriously. He wrote, "...it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret." (vs12). Now the fact that men do them in secret shows that even they, those who do them, know what it is—know that it's sin, know that it's shameful and shouldn't be seen. They try to hide their evil.

But nothing can be hidden. Paul said that in verse 13, "But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light." Wherever there is light, darkness is dispelled. And wherever the Light of Christ shines in the lives of His people, or in giving the Gospel, error is exposed and things become clear.

That last phrase, "everything that becomes visible is light," may mean that, 'People whose sins are exposed by the Gospel are brought out of the darkness—are converted. They become light.' It's a difficult text, but it certainly means that through the Light of Christ in the Gospel and the Word of God, we, His church, expose sin and unbelief.

The passage concludes with Paul giving an exhortation to do that, in verse 14. And he exhorts them with a quotation.

"For this reason it says,  
'Awake, sleeper,  
And arise from the dead,  
And Christ will shine on you.' " (vs14).

The source of that quote is not certain. Some have suggested this may have been taken from an early Christian hymn. Or more likely, it's a paraphrase of an Old Testament passage like Isaiah chapter 60, verse 1, "Arise, shine; for your light has come, And the glory of the LORD has risen upon you."

Or it could be a combination of various Old Testament verses.

But the call to 'wake up' is common in Scripture. And the meaning is clear: Christians are to be alert and active. We are to shake off indifference to the things that are moral, to the things that are spiritual. Shake off indifference; we are Light, and are to be walking "as children of Light". (vs8).

Spiritual lethargy, spiritual laziness is really worldliness; and it renders the Christian, and the church, weak and ineffective. Satan can't steal our soul. You are secure in the Lord. Every believer in Jesus Christ is eternally secure. John chapter 10 makes that very clear: 'We're in the Father's hand. We're in Christ's hand. We're in both their hands. We are secure, and no one can pluck us out.' Satan cannot steal our soul...but he can steal our strength and our usefulness.

In 1938 Winston Churchill published his speeches given over the prior decade in a book that was titled, *While England Slept*. It was a series of warnings about the growing danger in Europe. World War I, known then as 'The Great War', ended in 1918. It had been a catastrophe. Citizens of England, and the leadership of England were exhausted; they couldn't imagine another nightmare like that. That was 'The Great War'.

But one man on the continent wasn't exhausted. He was eager to reverse the fortunes of war, and expand his Third Reich across Europe. He was rearming while England slept. No one listened to Churchill; they didn't want to. So they settled for appeasement, compromise. The result, you know, was a *second* war, far greater than the first one.

There have been times when the church was vigorous, grounded in the truth, active, and triumphant. The early chapters of the Book of Acts are an example of that. They reveal a vigorous, young church. But then comes opposition—it will always come when the church is pure, and strong, and active.

The early chapters show that, but then the *evil one* begins to work. He always works when he sees us in a healthy, active condition. And he's always rearming; he's always shooting his fiery darts, (and we'll come to that in chapter 6).

So it wasn't long before the early church became factional, divided, sectarian. False teachers arose from within. There was opposition from without—from priests, philosophers, and the state. It's all in the Book of Acts—and it is a pattern throughout history.

First success, early success, is not final success. That won't come until the Lord returns with a sword and sets up His kingdom. Until then the devil is active; he's always active. He “prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.” (1Pe 5:8). He has not been bound; he is out there and active.—And the devil never sleeps.

But the church does. It sleeps when individual Christians sleep and becomes indifferent to the things of God: Neglect the Scriptures, neglect the truth, neglect prayer, neglect the use of their gifts. It happens when we fail personally to learn of the Lord and His ways, or fail in our duties to each other and don't, “consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds”, as the author of Hebrews urges us to do in chapter 10, verse 24.

When the Word of God is neglected, the church is weakened and drifts—and sleeps. And so to prevent that from occurring in Ephesus, or to arouse those who were

sleeping, Paul wrote, "Awake, sleeper; And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you." (vs14). Now that might appear to be addressing non-believers. The language fits that, "arise from the dead." But the context doesn't fit that. Paul is writing to, and addressing, believers. He's telling them to 'Awake!'

Dr. Johnson made a connection with 1 Corinthians 3, verse 3, where Paul corrected the Corinthians for their, 'spiritually stunted growth and bad behavior.' He told them they were, "walking like mere men"—'like mere men, but they were not 'mere men'. They were 'like It', but they were not 'that'. They were not natural men. They were not unbelieving, unregenerate men—but they were living like it. He told them that they were "fleshly" and for all to correct and change their behavior.

Believers respond to that; those with a new nature and new heart with the Spirit of God within us, (who "sealed" us ... we saw that in chapter 1, verse 13, and we'll see it again in this chapter), those who have the Spirit of God and a new nature will respond to that. But here, when the saints sleep with spiritual indifference, they believe like unbelievers.

But they're no longer dead; they are alive and they are to behave like it! 'Live as alive!' That's what he's telling them. And as they do that, (Awake and arise!), Christ will shine on them. He will give them, (He will give us), the grace and the power—the illumination and the vitality to live for Christ and God's glory. It's a life that calls for vigilance. It's a life that calls for watchfulness.

We are never in that place where we can take our ease and slack off like the "sluggard" of the Proverbs. That's when poverty comes as a robber—just as it did for the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus asked Peter, James, and John to, 'Keep watching!' In fact, He didn't ask, He told them, "Keep watching and praying..." (Mat 26:41). They didn't. You know what happened; they slept; He came back. He woke them up a second time and said the same thing and went back to His prayer, to the Father...and they fell asleep again. —They slept! When Judas and the soldiers came, they

were unprepared for the crisis and they all deserted the Lord—they fled into the night and Peter denied Him three times.

It's dangerous to sleep. So may the Holy Spirit keep us spiritually alert and active, trusting in Christ, living in His Light, and growing in grace and knowledge.

But there may be some here who may be asleep in spiritual death—in unbelief. You may be unregenerate, you have not yet been born again, then hear verse 14 as a Gospel text and, 'Awake sleeper! And arise from the dead!'

Only God can make that happen, so look to Him. Pray for His grace and act upon the command of the Gospel to believe in Jesus Christ as God's eternal Son and our only Savior.

*(Closing prayer)* Father, we are thankful that You are a rock—that the Triune God is a rock that we can lean on. And when we fail, You pick us up, and You correct us...You don't cast us off. —We give You praise and thanks for that.

And that should move us to be a people who are awake and want to serve You faithfully. May we do that. You've given us new hearts; You've given us new natures; stimulate us to live as the Light that we are. We can do that by Your grace, and by Your grace alone, so we look to You for the blessing of that. And thank You that You hear our prayers and You answer.

Now the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. In Christ's name, Amen.

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