



Photo by [Jad Limcaco](#) on Unsplash

*You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord, so live your life as children of light. Light produces fruit that consists of every sort of goodness, justice, and truth. Therefore, test everything to see what's pleasing to the Lord, ... (Ephesians 5: 8-10)*

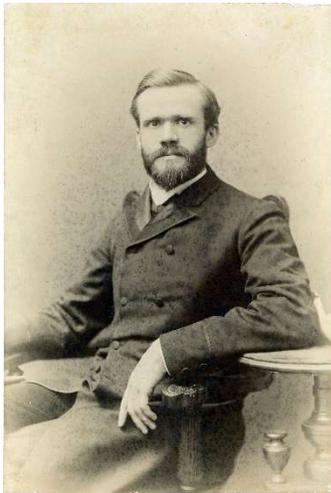
Ephesians Chapter 5 is sort of a moral compass. The author(s) of Ephesians (maybe including St. Paul, or maybe not) provide(s) something of an ethical/religious map for his (their) readers. One assumption is that this epistle was intended for the early “Christ believing” community in Ephesus. 1<sup>st</sup> Century CE Ephesus was a pluralistic and large city – perhaps with more than 150,000 citizens. It was a Roman provincial capital located on the Ionian Sea’s coastline. Consequently, it was a vital location for trade and commerce. It was consequently a leading political and intellectual center. (Ephesus Tours, n.d.). Clearly Jewish and Gentile communities were plentiful there.

Some historical sources indicate that St. Paul spent two to three years in Ephesus (52-55 CE). If true, he sought to create a (in broad terms) a Judeo-Christian faith community in a diverse and largely polytheistic imperial center. For example, there were large temples there including one dedicated to the Roman Emperor Hadrian and another to the Greek Goddess Artemis (Roman Goddess, Diana). These temples were cultic and many artisans and other workers were directly connected to sustaining themselves and their beliefs. In my opinion, Ephesus would have been an ideal setting for Paul to debate with opponents of his Christ-centered theology alongside of his efforts in establishing a set of communal moral and ethical behaviors for the faithful community he was “planting.” [Rev. Margaret Aymer, Ph.D.](#) writes:

*“The author of Ephesians seeks to set boundaries and ethics for life together as a community of faith, boundaries that call community members to pursue goodness, justice (or righteousness) and truth. Part of that pursuit includes not only following truth, but truth-telling; exposing that which is false or secretive to community discernment. One can understand, in light of the likely fragile nature of a community built around multiple ethnicities and cultures, the need for honesty, forthrightness and transparency in community dealings. Such an ethic would be critical for the survival of the “blended family” of the early church.”*  
(Aymer, 2020)

The Koine Greek [term περιπατέω \(peripateō\)](#) appears more than 30 times in the epistles attributed to Paul. The two primary means of this verb are to walk (as one does when

exercising) and how a person conducts her or himself. (Blue Letter Bible, n.d.) It is, generally speaking, unwise to lift the elements of a religious letter out of its historical cultural context and (literally) place the teaching into our present-day context. For example, the author of Ephesians directs women (wives) to be submissive to their husbands. (Ephesians 5: 22-23) This moral guidance, especially when it is unaccompanied by the verses following it (Ephesians 5: 24-29) is abhorrent. Nonetheless, such directives were indicative of 1<sup>st</sup> Century moral codes. Needless to say, there are contemporary Christian communities who literally apply this same instruction in their familial relationships.



More than 100 years ago, American Baptist Pastor and theologian wrote these words:

*“We have a Social Gospel. We need a systematic theology large enough to match it and vital enough to back it. ... Every forward step in the historical evolution of religion has been marked by a closer union of religion and ethics and by the elimination of non-ethical religious performances. This union of religion and ethics reached its highest perfection in the life and mine of Jesus.”* (Rauschenbusch, 1917)

Much more recently, The Episcopal Church’s Presiding Bishop, The Most Reverend Sean Rowe wrote:

*“These days, it can seem like we are living in a wasteland created by the forces that keep people trapped in violence and division, separated from one another and from God. Drawing on the story of the Exodus, I call this condition Pharaoh’s imagination, and these days, I think much of our world is captive to it.*

*Our vocation as Christians is to turn away from Pharaoh’s imagination toward God’s imagination. In the Bible, we are called again and again to understand the world as God sees it—as a place where divisions and hatred are overcome by God’s love, which makes all things new.”* (Rowe, 2026)

I’m emphasizing Gospel-based ethics and praxis because, in many ways, we are in something of a similar moral and spiritual situation as was the early Ephesian community. The world around us is pluralistic culturally and religiously. This is even true within differing and often extreme understanding of who Jesus is and how we are faithful disciples. Our manners of life away from worship and parochial activities are important. How do we “show up”? Our Anglican moral compass guides us toward accomplishing 5 “Marks of Mission.” These are:

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom (Reign)

2. To teach, baptize and nurture new believers
3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth (Anglican Communion, 2026)

Lent is a time to tie together our prayerful and actionable Christian lives. Let us all take time to prayerfully ponder how we distinguish ourselves from unhealthy secular trends even as respond prophetically and pastorally as people of God and faithful Episcopalians, as a parish and as individual efforts to live more fully into God's Grace in troubling times.

Blessings along The Way, Jim+