

Lighting the Darkness, Pt. 1

Ephesians 5:6-10 (03/11/18)

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Ephesians 5:6-10, *Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not be partakers with them; 8 for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light 9 (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), 10 trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.*

Charles Wesley couldn't have described the work of God in our souls more powerfully, accurately, and beautifully than he did in that hymn we sang this morning:

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night.
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.*

That's exactly what Paul is describing for us in our text this morning. You were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord! And if you are light in the Lord, you have a high and holy calling – to radiate light into the darkness of this world with your daily life. How do you do that? The next two messages will help us light the darkness all around us. This morning, radiate the light in your own life – verse 6-10; next week, radiate the light into your world – verses 11-14.

I'm going to be very "creative" in my outline today: What you were – darkness (6-8a), What you are – light in the Lord (8b), How to walk – as children of light (8c-10).

WHAT YOU WERE – DARKNESS – vv. 6-8a

6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not be partakers with them; 8 for you were formerly darkness,

In previous weeks, Bryce laid out for us in crystal clear terms the Christian sexual ethic – to choose God above your own self-serving pleasures and idols of your heart. God warns us in verse seven not to be partakers or participate with them in all the sexual immorality of verses 3-5. Like a father warning his son or daughter, "Listen up. Don't let anyone deceive you or lie to you, using empty, truthless, worthless words saying that living for your own pleasures is no big deal, that God isn't all that concerned about messing around sexually outside marriage, that His grace is so great it doesn't really matter so get rid of those guilt feelings." Beware. These are empty words that come out of the darkness.

The reality is in verse 6. Know this. God's wrath is coming on all those who continue in their disobedience and rebellion. The futuristic present tense of "is coming" emphasizes its certainty. This certainty is a heavy reality that our culture has become completely ignorant, deceived, and hardened to. What is God's wrath? It is God's holy, angry, and just punishment on all those who continue in rebellion against God and reject the gospel of Christ. In Matthew 8:12 Jesus called it outer darkness with weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Have you ever spelunked? Then when you got deep in the cave, you turned off the flashlights? Within seconds you felt darkness envelop you; darkness so deep you couldn't even see your finger right in front of your eyes. And no matter how long you sat there trying to adjust your eyes, total darkness remained; a physical darkness, darkness you could feel. A minute seemed long. An hour would be really long. A day, almost intolerable. A year may drive you insane. What about ten years? One thousand years? Complete darkness forever and ever with no escape? That's the penalty for dying in rebellion against God.

That's a scary thought. Have you thought of it? Russ Solomon was the founder of Tower Records. Last Sunday he was watching the Oscar awards ceremony, sipping whiskey, and making a sarcastic comment about someone's clothes. His wife went out to refill his whiskey. When she returned, Russ had died of a heart attack. When I read that, the thought struck me. Imagine, one moment watching the Oscars, the next moment facing the wrath of God as a son of disobedience. The last breath a lost person takes is the last bit of God's mercy!

So in verse seven Paul warns us, "Don't participate with them in their sinful behavior." God saved you from sinful behavior, so don't get dragged back into behavior worthy of God's wrath. By the way, we must not be ashamed to talk about and teach about and warn about God's wrath. Where else will people learn about it if not in the church? You won't hear it on CNN, or from the professors at the universities, or Jimmy Kimmel or Joel Osteen. I found a Faith Bible Church Sunday School paper in the possession of a first grader recently. I wondered about the large, out-of-the-lines crayon scribbles of deep red and fiery orange. Then I saw the title: Wrath. God has wrath against sin. I'm thankful our church does not hold back teaching the full council of God, and divine wrath is part of that.

You were formerly darkness - Before we rise up in self-righteous indignation against all those sinners out there, remember this (v. 8a) – you were darkness yourself. We were all born in darkness, nature's night. When Adam sinned in Genesis 3, spiritual darkness dropped over the soul of man, and every human being born ever since is born with a dark soul. What does that mean? In your own being, regardless of who you are, where you live, how smart or educated or poor or wealthy you are, you were born in darkness and that darkness remained in you. You couldn't see God's truth, the gospel, even your own sin. You really didn't know purpose or where you were going. You may have seen lots of really cool stuff. You probably admired yourself in the mirror. You saw what others were doing and wanted to be better than they were. But you didn't see God and your responsibility to Him. You didn't see Christ in a personal way. You didn't see your own sin and guilt before God and that you were worthy of His wrath. You may have struggled with horrible relationships or you may have had really great relationships. But one thing you did not see in your darkness is the glory of Christ.

WHAT YOU ARE – LIGHT IN THE LORD – vs. 8b

8 for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light

John 1:5 says Christ came as a blazing light shining into the darkness of this world, but His own people rejected him in their darkness. John 3:18 says men reject Him because they love darkness rather than light. And Genesis 1:2 is good! There was darkness on the face of the deep until God said, "Let there be light." Then there was light! So there you were in your spiritual darkness. You heard the gospel, but you couldn't see it because you were blind on the inside. More is needed. Here is the greatest of all miracles. God sent a "shaft of light" into your spirit and filled "your dungeon" with light so you saw and understood for the first time the meaning of the gospel in your own life. You sensed the weight of your own sin and saw God's provision for your sin in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Paul describes this in 2 Corinthians 4.

*2 Corinthians 4:3-6, And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 4 in whose case the god of this world has **blinded the minds of the unbelieving** so that they might not see **the light of the gospel** of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 5 For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is **the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.***

You were perishing. You were under Satan's authority and your mind was blinded to the gospel, veiled to the gospel. You couldn't see your need of the gospel. You couldn't see the glory of Christ. You may have been raised in church, in a godly home and you heard the gospel over and over, but it never penetrated your heart. You were darkness.

But now you are light in the Lord - But now! Feed on those two words, "but now." God Himself, sovereignly, graciously, mercifully, savingly turned on the light in your heart – He has shone in your heart.

God sovereignly turned on the light of the gospel in your heart, your mind – you couldn't do it on your own, you had no power or desire to turn on your own light. God shined His light into your heart to enable you to know, to grasp, and to be affected by His glory revealed to you in His Son. You humbled your heart and trusted in Christ as your Lord and Savior. You were in darkness; now you are light in the Lord! God turned on your inner light and now you see and understand spiritual things. All of God! God gets all the glory! That's the essence of the sovereignty of God.

Now we know where we are going. We see God's truths. We see our own sin. We see our need for grace and mercy in Christ. We confess our sins freely, we see forgiveness. We see the world, eternal souls lost in darkness. We see why God left us here. We see what God is calling us to – a worthy walk in humility, a loving walk of self-denial, a walk in light, a walk in wisdom. We don't see everything, but we see enough to know how to live and please God. We see the importance of the Bible. We love the Bible. We walk in the light of the Word of God. We know the unfolding of God's Word gives light! Here are two great verses to tuck away in your memory bank as a child of light.

Psalms 119:105, "Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path."

Psalms 119:130, "The unfolding of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple."

HOW TO WALK AS CHILDREN OF LIGHT - vv. 8c-10

8c-9 Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), 10 trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.

You were darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord. There just couldn't be a bigger contrast. And now God says we are to live as children of light, radiate the Light of Christ into your world. People are either darkness or light. All believers are light; all unbelievers in Christ are darkness. And the people in darkness need to see God's people radiate that light. The world doesn't need worldly Christians or compromising Christians; Christians who dabble in the same sins the world does, who try to live as much like the world as possible, or to get as close to the edge as possible. No, this world in darkness needs to see believers who are radiating brightly for the glory of Christ. The church is a body of people who radiate Christ's light. Philippians 2:15 says we are "children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, **among whom you appear as lights in the world.**" Children of light love Christ, want to be like Christ, and are full of hope and joy and purpose. They always radiate light, everywhere, in every circumstance, with every relationship.

So what does it look like to radiate your light into the world's darkness as a Christ-loving, Christ-honoring believer? Paul says the fruit of the radiance of Light is summarized in three great qualities: goodness, righteousness, and truth. Knowing these qualities gives you focus on how to shine your light day by day. Here's a tip on remembering them. You've seen those car license plates with abbreviated words, right? So visualize GRT, think "Great," and let those letters remind you of Paul's great qualities of light...goodness, righteousness, truth. Remember them. Repeat them. Use them. All of the fruit of the Spirit and the marks of godly love in 1 Corinthians 13 come under these three qualities. Write them out. Some of us are studying Daniel. He loved his God and was a blazing light in the middle of a dark, pagan Babylon. He was a GRT man, a man of goodness, righteousness, and truth! That's God's summary of radiating the light of Christ into your world. Let's break them down into practical living.

Goodness - Instead of living selfishly and arrogantly, you'll do as much good as you can for others. You will bless and give grace to others. You'll be quick to forgive others. You'll return good for evil. Even when others misuse you or criticize you or spit on you, like Christ, you'll do them good. You'll love your enemies, expecting nothing in return. The light shines out one way! It isn't concerned about getting. It's all about giving and meeting needs.

Righteousness - You love God's righteousness. You value God's righteousness so highly you determine to do the right thing. This isn't self-righteousness; you have none in yourself. You were darkness, in sin and nature's night until God shot that ray of light into your soul and you awoke to believe in Christ to save you. His righteousness was imputed, placed to your account. You were justified by faith alone, accepted by God because of Christ, and now His righteousness is working in you to do His will.

Truth - Rather than running and hiding and covering and blaming and excusing like Adam did, you'll walk in the light of God's truth. You'll be honest, genuine, sincere, and without hypocrisy. You can't fake this light. You must know the true and living and sovereign God. You are committed to God's ways, like Daniel. You have a high view of God. He is sovereign over your life and everything that comes into your life. You want your life to be conformed to the truth of who Christ is. Radiating the fruit of truth means you know God. You know your Bible. You know how to apply the Bible to your life and can help others apply the truths of the Word to their lives. But mainly, you know and live in the sphere of God's truth. When you mess up, you are quick to acknowledge your sin or mistake and go back to doing the good, right, and true thing. You radiate the truth of Christ.

Learning to please the Lord - Let's wrap this up with verse 10. "Walk as children of light," says Paul. But how? "By trying to learn" or literally "testing what is pleasing to God." This is your grand, ultimate motive and goal. 2 Corinthians 5:9 says we make it our aim and our goal to please Him! Please Him, not yourself and not others. Oh, how tempting it is to try to please as many people as possible because we want people to like us. How many of us do that? Rather, our goal is to test everything we do, every day, with every person by asking, "Is this pleasing to God?" Paul has given us three tests to apply to everything; remember GRT? Is this good? Is this right? Is this true? Is how I'm relating to my family, my spouse, my siblings, my parents, my friends, my co-workers – is it good? Did I do the right thing? Was I honest and not manipulating or covering or lying? God doesn't tell us every detail for all our decisions, but applying this test gives His guidance. Bring your decisions about marriage, money you spend, your job, where you want to live to this grid. Is this good, right, and true?

The main point of our passage is this: God saved you out of darkness into light to walk as a child of light, radiating the light of Christ more and more throughout your life. Walk humbly, because you were darkness. You are only light because God's good and sovereign grace pierced the darkness of your heart with that shaft of the truth of the gospel causing you to be transferred forever out of the domain of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son.

This week, every morning, pray, "Help me to please you today." Every evening ask, "Did I please God today? Did my walk today radiate Goodness? Righteousness? Truth? Do I need to confess and ask forgiveness? Remember how blessed you are to be light in the Lord.

What about you? You've heard the gospel, but has the message of Christ radically changed your life from darkness to light? Do you realize you are perishing outside of Christ and desperately need God to save you? Do you see? Really see? Can you say, "Once I was blind, but now I can see the Light of the world is Jesus?"