

Living in the Light

Ephesians 5:7-14

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”
John 8:12

Introduction: One of the best ways to make complex themes and concepts clear is to put them in everyday language that can be understood by everyone. The Bible does a masterful job of this (since God is the author, it makes sense). Jesus is called the **Lamb of God, Bread of Life, and the Good Shepherd**, pictures that are tangible and relatable. The church is called a **building, a household, and a place of citizenship**. We get to know Christ through the picture of marriage, forgiveness through the symbol of bread and wine, and newness of life through going down into and out of the water of baptism.

One of the most stark and beautiful pictures that is oft repeated in Scripture is the contrast/comparison of **light and darkness**. Even in our modern day of conveniences where light is all around and we do not have to think about it very often (unless there is not enough electricity to go around during this heat wave), we know the vast difference between the two. Most of us have experienced a time in life where we were **afraid of the dark**. My daughter is learning to drive and she has to spend a number of hours on the road at night to make sure she can navigate the road when it is harder to see. We know that the dark makes things harder, creates a strain on our senses, and we must accommodate for it to exist.

When the Bible speaks figuratively about light and darkness, it is illustrating both **intellectually and morally**, where the light represents **truth and holiness**, and the darkness **ignorance or falsehood and evil/wickedness**. A quick survey of Scripture paints a picture of how light and darkness play out in both God’s divine nature and the human condition:

Light: God is our light and our salvation (Ps. 27:1), and He is defined as light, and in Him there is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5) His Word is a lamp to our feet and light to our path (Ps. 119:105), with His Words giving light (Ps. 119:130). Jesus is the true light that came into the world (John 1:9), the light of the world who gives the light of life (John 8:12). He called His people Israel to be a light to the nations (Isa. 49:6) and called His disciples and us to be the light of the world, set on a hill, to let our light shine before others to see our good works and give glory to our Father (Matt. 5:14-16; Phil. 2:15).

Darkness: Is the antithesis of light. Darkness summed up our depravity before salvation (Eph. 4:18), since we were under the power of Satan and the passions of our flesh in the domain of darkness (Eph. 2:1-3; Col. 1:13). Darkness defined our condition (Eph. 5:8) and our destiny, as those who die apart from Christ will exist in *outer darkness*, where there is only weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 8:12)

Darkness and light are incompatible with each other. In fact, the first act of Creation was separating the light and darkness (Gen. 1:4), since when light breaks forth, the darkness is gone. There can be no fellowship between light and darkness (2 Cor. 6:14 – “Don’t be unequally yoked”), especially since Jesus said that the **light came into the world, and the people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil** (John 3:19), forever separating those who love the light and those who hate it. Those that hate the light do not want their works to be exposed (John 3:20), so if one loves the darkness, they will by definition hate the light since it is a threat to their very life. Perhaps there is no better verse to illustrate this battle between light and darkness than **2 Cor. 4:3-4**:

“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

When we are called to **“Walk as children of light”**, it not only connects with all the other aspects of walking in Ephesians (in a manner worthy of our calling, differently than those who do not know Christ, in love, and in wisdom), but is set in contrast to the darkness that categorizes our enemy and the world as a whole.

Light Transforms (7-8)

*Therefore, do not become partners with them; for at one time **you were darkness**, but now **you are light** in the Lord. **Walk as children of light***

Light transforms. In fact, the best news that comes out of the fact that Satan tries to blind our eyes comes two verses later: *“For God, who said, ‘**Let light shine out of darkness,**’ has shone in our hearts to give the **light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.**”* In other words, when we were dead and in the kingdom of darkness, light came into our eyes so that we could see God’s glory, our own sin, and the Person of Jesus Christ, so that we could believe, ask for forgiveness of sin, and turn to follow Him. The light melted out heart of stone and replaced it with a heart of flesh that now is responsive to the commands of Christ and see them as good, rather than burdensome (1 John 5:3) Notice **two things about this transformation:**

- 1. Transformation changes who we are, not just what we do** – Notice that before we were saved, we were not **“IN DARKNESS”**, we WERE DARKNESS. We were not just a victim of darkness, but a contributor of it. Darkness was our identity and pervaded everything in us. Our understanding was darkened, our life was alienated from God, we were ignorant, and had hearts that were stone cold and hardened (Eph. 4:18). But when light broke through, we were changed from the inside out, becoming LIGHT (**“You ARE the light of the world”**). We were transferred out of the domain of darkness into the kingdom of His beloved Son (Col. 1:13) and into His marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9). Salvation in Jesus Christ is a complete change, not a tweaking or nice addition. We are separated from our former condition, realm, destiny, power, master, and desires and given something completely new as a result.
- 2. Transformation changes what we do, since it changes who we are** – Because the gospel transforms, it THEN not only cleanses us from the inside out, but WILL change our reality toward obedience and holiness. Because we are light, it is inevitable and the most consistent thing to **WALK AS CHILDREN OF LIGHT**, which is now both possible and expected. If God had not changed us first, this command to walk would be impossible and cruel. This is exactly why we major on starting with the gospel BEFORE we focus on calling someone to conform morally. Trying to get someone to conform to a Biblical standard before heart change produces cynicism, hypocrisy, and the mere form of religion. Any focus on morality alone simply points people to the fact that morality alone leaves one empty and hopeless, since the Law itself pointed people to the reality that they could never keep the Law enough for their own righteousness.

Light Produces (9)

(For the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true)

Our hearts always produce, and the fruit in our life REVEAL who we truly are. You can try to hide or mask realities, but eventually our words and actions will betray our heart. In Galatians 5:19-23, the **fruit produced out of the fleshly** (unsaved or unredeemed) **heart is evident** by sexual immorality, impurity,

sensuality, idolatry, etc., and the **fruit produced by the Spirit** is love, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. A new heart will produce new fruit. *What does maturity look like in our walk with Christ? A growing and pervasive amount of fruit produced out of our heart flowing out in obedience.* What does this fruit look like?

Goodness – This is a characteristic of God alone, who is not only good but created everything as good (1 Tim. 4:4). Here, the mature fruit produced out of us is a **moral excellence**, good in both nature and effect. *Goodness finds its fullest and highest expression in that which is willingly and sacrificially done for others* (1 Thess. 5:15 – “Always seek after that which is good or one another and for all men”).

Righteousness – This has to do with our relationship with both God and how we live. God declares us righteous through the work of Christ (Rom. 4:5; Phil. 3:9) and because we have Christ’s righteousness imputed to us, we are able to live as ‘instruments of righteousness to God (Rom. 6:13), pursue righteousness (1 Tim. 6:11) and practice righteousness (1 John 2:29).

Truth – The follower of Christ exists in the light of truth, which makes up the entirety of honesty, reliability, and integrity. Truth cuts through the lies and deception of our enemy which is played out in culture, and since truth does not operate in the shadows or secret, we can live with the utmost of honesty before others.

An Area of Caution: Living in a Biblical community or growing up in a Christian home has incredible benefit and is helpful on so many levels, not the least of which is receiving care and encouragement, but there is potential downside as well. We can easily begin to ACT like everyone around even if our hearts are not truly changed. We learn the lingo, understand the expectation, and follow the instructions of service and activity that cause us to LOOK like everyone else, at least externally. But this is simply **fruit stapling**. It’s like trying to prove you have a wonderful vineyard in your yard, but when people come over to see it, you run out and staple a bunch of grapes you bought at the store. When they arrive, you go out and pluck a beautiful bunch of grapes, but it is a fraud. Left on the vine, these would shrivel up and die (with only raisins left – mmm...nature’s candy!).

We have seen this happen far too often through the years with young people who are involved at the church, but go off to college and “fall away” from the faith. We’ve seen it over the last couple of years during COVID where people stopped **going** to church which revealed they were not part **of the church**, since they have stopped walking with the Lord at all. The gospel must be our emphasis, with the love of Christ its central call, and worship as its goal. **Time is a great revealer and our actions are truth tellers.** Our goal is not external conformity as parents or pastors, but continually presenting the light of Jesus and calling all to yield to Him with all that they are.

Light Discerns (10)

and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

But obedience is not an end in itself or even the ultimate goal. Obedience is a means to an end of **pleasing and glorifying the Lord**. We cannot earn anything with God, since He loves us unconditionally, died for us, and gave us forgiveness and righteousness that came by the gift of faith alone. If we are fully loved and secure in hope, our life moves from trying to prove to simply evaluating how to please. I’ve said it before but having a secure relationship with my dad meant that I did not try to achieve or act in ways to try to gain his favor or improve my status, but simply wanted to please him. Notice a few things here:

- 1) **Pleasing the Lord is a Priority** – In other words, this happens *proactively* since we do not simply default to His pleasure. We are to be “fully pleasing” to Him (Col. 1:10), bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of Him. We cannot please God if we do not know Him. “We make it our aim to please the Lord.” (2 Cor. 5:9) Pleasing the Lord is not merely a nice add on, it is essential if we are to worship and glorify God
- 2) **Pleasing the Lord requires discernment, evaluation, and examination** – “*Now may the God of peace...equip you with everything good that you may do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ...*” (Heb. 13:20-21). Pleasing the Lord does not simply happen in the black and white lines of obedience, but in the white spaces in between, which takes much wisdom to live by Biblical principle. When our minds are renewed, we can “test to discern what is the will of God” (Rom. 12:2), since we will “test everything to hold fast to what is good (1 Thess. 5:21) so we’ll know how to walk and to please God (1 Thess. 4:1). Pleasing God is not a list of do’s and don’ts, it is putting into practice ALL that Christ commanded and taught, and seeking to please Him from the inside out, from our desires and motives to our actions and words. It is seeing the *entirety of self and life* as an opportunity to live for the pleasure of ONE. This is the essence of worship.

William Temple defined this kind of worship this way:

*“Worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the **quickening of the conscience by his holiness; the nourishment of mind with His truth; the purifying of the imagination with His beauty; the opening of the heart to His love; the surrender of will to His purpose** --- all this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable.”*

Light Reveals (11-14a)

***Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.** 12 For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. 13 But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, 14 for anything that becomes visible is light.*

Light shines but darkness still pervades. Darkness characterizes the world, but deeds of darkness can exist even within the church itself. Paul called out the church in Corinth for allowing a deed of darkness to go on, the type of activity that was not even tolerated among pagans (1 Cor. 5:1), and instead of dealing with the sin and sinner, they allowed it to continue, exposing the rest of the church to leaven which would potentially infect the whole (5:6). These were deeds that were shameful and typically done in secret, but were exposed and thus needed to be confronted and disciplined. God’s church is its most effective when it is the purest, when it is a **“vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.”** (2 Tim. 2:20)

The unfruitful works of darkness are any and all that Paul covered in Ephesians 4 & 5, including lusts, deceit, lying, stealing, speech that tears down, bitterness, wrath, anger, complaining, immorality, impurity, greed, idolatry, and coarse jesting. None of these should be **participated in**. We want no part in them. We keep ourselves from them, regardless if they go on with people in the church or in the world. But avoidance is not our only **responsibility. We must also expose them.**

The word *expose* means “bring to light or reveal”, but it also carries the range of “reprove, correct, and discipline”. This means that we cannot simply stay silent when others exist in ongoing darkness, but must let the light shine, which takes much love and wisdom to do this well. ***How do we do this?***

- **Let our light shine out of our life** – *“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” (Matt. 5:14, 16)* Our lives should *“shine as lights in the world”* (Phil. 2:15) as we live in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation. A life lived in the light will by definition shine and cut through the darkness. In the church, a life lived in the integrity of the light will bring conviction to those who are in sin, and will give a visible manifestation of the hope we have in Christ (1 Pet. 3:15). We do all of this with **gentleness and respect**.
- **Let the light shine out of the Word** – Our lives matter, but the gospel and truth are ultimately communicated in words. *“For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life.” (Prov. 6:23)* *“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and marrow, and **discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from its sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.**”* (Heb. 4:12-13) We will all have to give an account of what is in our heart (1 Cor. 4:5), and it’s the Word of God that is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and for training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16).

Scripture convicts down to the deepest recesses of our hearts. Exposing the darkness, then, happens at three levels. 1) **Personally** – After Christ transforms us, we still deal with the reality of sin and our flesh. It is the Word that brings conviction in areas we try to keep secret and hidden. *“Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there is any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”* (Psalm 139:23-24). These hidden sins can be an anchor to our soul, robbing us of joy and effectiveness, riddling us with unneeded guilt and shame. When all things are brought to the light, we can find the fresh air of forgiveness and the power of righteousness. This is why the aim of our teaching is the mind AND heart, from the Word, centered on Christ and the holiness of God. 2) **With other believers** – If we know a brother or sister is caught up in sin, or there is wrong thinking (“I’m the man of the house and my wife is there to serve me!”), or a drift from following Christ, we must be willing to confront and expose these unfruitful deeds. This must be done in wisdom and love, but it must be done. A refusal to expose leaves that person to continue to wallow in sin and creates the possibility of spreading within the church. 3) **The world at large** – We do not just quote verses at people, but when people ask for the reason we have hope, we must be willing and able to share the truth of God’s Word, explaining the holiness and expectation of God, the depravity and condition of man, and the hope we have in Jesus Christ. This often comes when worldviews are shone to be a house of cards.

When anything is exposed to the light, it becomes visible, for the light makes everything visible. This is our greatest resource in the battle against our own sin and helping the world come to grips with theirs.

Light Awakens (14b)

Therefore, it says,

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

Paul ends this section with a call, to anyone who can see the light. He quotes and adapts from **Isaiah 60:1**, which says, *“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.”* Paul shows that the prophecy of this text is fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the glory of the Lord that is now upon us. This is extremely hopeful. This is the resolution of the battle against our enemy trying to blind the eyes of those in darkness. Jesus has come to shine through the darkness:

“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

2 Cor. 4:6

To those who do not believe today, the call is to see God, your sin, and the work of Jesus on your behalf. Admit your sin, confess it, ask for forgiveness, turning from your self-rule and yielding yourself completely to Christ.

To those who know Christ, it is to wake up and deal with any sin that is characterized by darkness, the hidden, secret sins that God knows and you wish no one else will. Let the light shine, wake up, and stop walking in darkness.

All of this so we can live out our true condition, walking as children of the light in the midst of a dark world.