

“Live As Children Of Light”

4 October 2020 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

Welcome & Call To Worship:

Hymn of Preparation: IPH 408 In Christ Alone

Prayers of Adoration & Confession: Rev. Sam Mawhinney

Reading: Ephesians 5:8-14

Sermon:

Max Lucado tells a story about a box of candles who refused in a time of darkness to give light, each one having an excuse to the family when asked. When the husband told his wife that the candles refused to come out of the press and shine, she replied they must be church candles! Oh dear - the truth hurts!

Christians and Christian churches have struggled with how best to relate to the world and have responded in a variety of ways. The darker the surrounding culture and people, the more difficult it has been.

- Pietism: withdrawal into a self-contained personal holiness
- Monasticism: withdrawal into a separated community
- Psychological: simply a withdrawal in our thinking. The world is too bad, therefore we disengage, become apathetic and uninvolved.
- Compromise: embrace the world's thinking and settle with them, ask the Scriptures to back up our views. Like the frog swimming in the warm water, life is gradually taken from the Church as it is engulfed in the world's thinking.

However, in the example of Jesus, the direction of travel was from heaven to earth, incarnation, to eat with “sinners”. We could describe it as *engagement*. The apostle Paul's instruction to the church in Ephesus is positive, “live a life of love” (v.2), as we saw last week and “live as children of light” (v.8). He has been speaking about this since Ephesians 4:17 and the NIV translation heads this entire section *Living as Children of Light*. This is important to understand and think through if we are to be effective lights, or witnesses, to the Lord Jesus. So, let us look at the text, Ephesians 5:8-14.

I. You Are Light In The Lord (v.8a)

Black and white, good and bad, dark and light are contrasts! Paul sets up a contrast when he describes these Ephesian Christians: “*you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord*”. He is speaking about conversion and it is shockingly radical. It was Jesus who said, “*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life*” (John 8:12). A Christian is a new creation; we once were darkness, spiritually speaking dead, not knowing God, in ignorance and error and rebellion towards God, following the world and its ruler, Satan (2:1-3), but now are light - not of ourselves, but in Christ.

How do you view yourself? It is an interesting question! Sadly, many of us, myself included are uncomfortable with who we are. But listen to who God's Word says you are: you are light

in the Lord. In Christ, you are light. Note it does not say (and we often think) you are *part* darkness (sin) and *part* light, nor are you *trying* to be light, but you *are* light. In Jesus, spiritually conceived by the Holy Spirit, we are light. Jesus shines in you. You have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph. 1:3). Each day you can say to yourself, "I am light in the Lord." This is a much better way to view yourself than the many ways we tend to emphasise. Who are you? You are light in Christ. Incredible!

II. Live As Light (v.8b-9)

Paul uses another picture of a fruit tree to explain that the fruit of light is goodness, righteousness and truth. I have found myself recently using the phrase "*walk in the direction of*" when describing a life of faith, and that fits with the idea here because "live" in our translation is literally "walk" in the original Greek. Paul tells us that to live as light means walking in the direction of what is good, right and true. He has been giving us direction in terms of ethics - don't lie, speak the truth in love; don't be angry, be kind and compassionate. In other words, always walk in the direction of what is good, right and true, as guided by the Word of God, for it is truth.

And as we walk, we are to "find out what pleases the Lord" (v.10). Discernment is needed. Look at Scripture, find out, discern what direction God wants us to walk. When you are unsure of something, concerned about what is going on, then find out, engage, search the Scriptures, talk to each other so that we might please the Lord. Engagement with others is good; it is right to find out more about the situation, know the Lord better, find out the truth and listen to what God says in His Word. Paul's commentary in his letter to the Philippian church is helpful in this matter (Phil 1:9-11).

III. Have Nothing To Do With The Fruitless Deeds Of Darkness (v.11-14)

A. Separate

It is at this point that we begin to see the difficulty Christians have. Light and darkness don't mix (John 1:5) and the interpretation of this phrase, "*have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness*", is important. It implies separation, in line with v.7, "do not be partners with them." We have looked at this issue before when we studied 1st Corinthians 5, which would be worth looking at again. There, Paul does not urge us to withdraw, as he says you would have to leave the world, and Jesus says, "*My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one*" (John 17:15).

There must be engagement with the world, we are not called to withdraw. The light must shine on the world, on the lives of those who do not know and follow Jesus, on its institutions, governments, and cultural activities.

B. Expose

The idea of light revealing or exposing what is going on is simple enough to grasp. Our dogs refused to come in this week and they were barking vigorously. They were outside the range of the security lights, so I got the torch and walked up the garden to find there was a badger and they were all fighting. Interestingly, considering what Paul argues here, my presence and the light persuaded the badger out of the garden and both dogs and badger to relative safety.

Light exposes and reveals the reality and it is also transformative. That has been the direction of travel throughout. Light produces good fruit and that is what Paul goes on to argue in the following verses 12-14.

I acknowledge the uncomfortable reality of light exposing darkness, the sense of confrontation can be judgemental. We are not comfortable with the reality of judgement and to have a judgemental attitude is unacceptable. The truth is that the love of Jesus is most clearly seen in the judgement He accepted for our sin. Sin must be exposed and accepted before we will look to Jesus for forgiveness and restoration. So Paul *does* urge us to confront and that can only happen if we are in contact with those who are dark (spiritually speaking). But his purpose is not condemnation or judgement for its own sake, but visibility and transformation. It is the sleeper being awakened, the dead made alive and the dark having the light of Jesus Christ. It is about life.

It is within this context that he states v.12, because he doesn't want to speak of the darkness and sin; it is much too serious an issue. He doesn't want to call out, or indeed shame; he wants the light to make visible and lead to transformation.

John Stott writes, *"Exposure sounds negative, showing people up for what they are, judgemental, condemning. And it is that. But light which exposes has positive evangelistic power . . . for it may bring people, as they see the ugliness of evil, to conviction of their sin and so to penitent faith in Jesus. This, then, is the twofold effect which a Christian's light has on the prevailing darkness: it makes visible and it makes light."*

What, then, is the nature of this confrontation? This has been much debated within the Church. Are we to live as light and say nothing, to say plenty and not live as light, or are we to live as light and speak about the light to aid understanding? The direction of travel, the example of Jesus and the apostles, is that we live and speak of Jesus to effect the change this light brings. Exposed by the light, to be transformed by the light.

IV. Be . . .

If we return in our minds to the story I started with, of the candles who refused to come out of the press, what lessons is Paul keen to teach and encourage us to live?

Be what you are, light! To do so, we need to stay close to the Lord and to each other so that our light will burn bright.

Be serious! Throughout this passage, Paul takes seriously the reality of sin and judgement, but he is restrained and respectful, he is sensitive and non-shaming, and in doing so, he is clear about the seriousness of how the Christian is to live. Refuse to partner with sin.

Be positive! The direction of travel for us - is it good, right and true?

Be engaged! Expose the darkness for what it is. Confront by your lifestyle and your conversation.

This is our calling to live as children of light.

Hymn of Reflection: Mighty To Save

Prayers for Others: Ken Gillanders

Closing Praise: Hear The Call Of The Kingdom

Announcements

Benediction: “To Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy - to the only God, our Saviour, be glory, majesty, power and authority , through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.” (Jude 1:24-25)