

"Light in the Dark"  
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Ephesians 5:8-17  
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Though I realize the scientific explanation is fairly simple, I've always found it interesting how a light shows up more clearly in the darkness. As I turn on my phone flashlight, some of you find it difficult to see whether it is emitting any light or not. However, if we turned off the lights in this room... which is not really easy to do, you would see the light of the flashlight very clearly. That simple experiment would illustrate a truth proclaimed in a gospel song a few years back: "The darker the night, the brighter the light shines." These days many folks are convinced things in our society are getting darker and darker. We have COVID and all the craziness surrounding it, economic uncertainty, and total confusion when it comes to issues involving sexuality.

Thirty years ago, Theologian Carl Henry wrote a book entitled, "The Twilight of a Great Civilization." Certainly the night has grown deeper since then. Whether it is the arts, politics, media, education, or even the church, spiritual barbarians are gaining influence and the very concepts of truth, goodness and beauty are being challenged. More and more people see biblical Christianity as a narrow, intolerant religion that stands in the way of real progress. For this reason, stories about Christians being discriminated against or harassed are becoming more and more common. Some of you have been following the case in Finland, where a member of Parliament, Paiva Rasanen, is being charged with "agitation against an ethnic group" and could face fines for saying that the Bible forbids homosexual behavior. In the United States, Canada and Europe, it is clear that the darkness is deepening around us. Though COVID, the craziness surrounding it or economic uncertainty may seem like our biggest problems, I would suggest the loss of a moral foundation and a basis for meaning and purpose in life is the really crisis.

Yet, things get darker, our culture is becoming more and more like the first century world in which the Christians in Ephesus lived. Political corruption, sexual immorality, and pagan religions dominated that society. It was not easy to be a Christian. When the apostle Paul wrote his letter to them, he knew they faced some real challenges. Yet, even more than that, he believed

God was providing great opportunities for the church. The darker the night became, the brighter the light could shine. As we continue our journey through the book of Ephesians, we come to chapter 5:8-17. As we look at what God has to say to us in this passage, my hope is that rather than being discouraged by the spiritual darkness around us, we will be encouraged as we think about the marvelous opportunities God is giving us to shine as lights in the darkness. Let's pause and pray that will happen.

Paul begins by reminding the Ephesians and us, that as Christians, we are light in the midst of a dark world. **Ephesians 5:8a For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.** As Christians, we are not inherently better than other people. By birth, by nature, we too were in spiritual darkness. Now, this does not mean we were all "bad" people. Some folks, especially in Minnesota, are very nice, even when they are groping around in the dark. The phrase simply means we were not following Jesus Christ, nor living for the glory of God. Some of you put your faith in Jesus at a very young age, and it is hard to recall a time when you were not a Christian. Yet, it is important to remember that there was a time for each of us, when we were without Christ. And except for the grace of God, would still be in spiritual darkness. However, now, in the Lord, through Jesus, we are children of light. John 1 tells us that Jesus is the light of the world and our relationship, our union with Him, makes us lights. Though we are made of the same stuff as everyone around us, through Jesus, God has graciously transformed us into new people, with a new purpose. This is true of every individual who is a genuine Christian. Now, remember, being a Christian involves more than going to church, getting baptized, repeating a prayer, or being a nice person. A Christian is someone who is trusting in Jesus Christ and receives the salvation He offers. If you are not doing that, it does not matter how bright, talented or good of a person you are. You are part of the darkness. If you are trusting in the Lord Jesus, however, it doesn't matter how little you may know about the Bible, or what type of sin you still struggle with, you are a light in this dark world.

You may not always be a very bright light, but you are a light.

Folks, the words Paul writes in this passage are for Christians, people who believe in and follow Jesus. If you are there today or watching on YouTube and are not truly a Christian, what you need to do, as God enables, is stop trusting in yourself or anyone else, and instead turn to Jesus Christ and experience God's amazing grace and salvation. If you are not sure what I mean by that, please talk to me very soon.

As Christians, we are lights in the darkness. That is who we are. So, what are we supposed to do? **Ephesians 5:8b Walk as children of light.** If you are a light, you need to live like one. **Ephesians 5:9 For the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true.** These three great virtues form a solid foundation in the Christian life. I sum up our responsibility this way: we are to love what is good, do what is right, and believe what is true. That is our job. Incidentally, I have recently started to add a fourth virtue. We are also to appreciate what is beautiful. That is a topic for another day. Paul says those three qualities, what is good, right, true, are "the fruit of the light." He implies these are in some way a natural part of being a Christian. When by God's grace we are following the Lord, or as Paul says in Galatians 5, "Keeping in step with the spirit," goodness, righteousness, and truth will characterize our lives. Think of some folks you know who are committed followers of Jesus Christ. John Piper, your aunt Sara, some other people in this room. Are goodness, righteousness, and truth a part of their lives? Of course they are. That's part of what being a light in this dark world is all about. Paul then gives some specific instructions on how to function as lights, how we, how you, can turn the light on and let it shine into the night.

First, fill your mind with God's word. As I said, we are to **Ephesians 5:8b Walk as children of light.** In **Ephesians 5:17** he adds, **Therefore do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is.** So how do we do that? How do we avoid foolishness and understand what God's will is? Through this book, the Bible, the Word of God. As we read it at home during our devotional time, as we discuss with others in Bible studies, as we listen to sermons here in church, we develop a greater knowledge of the Lord's will for us and

how we can please Him. A church sign reads, "To know the Bible is good, to know the author is better." That is very true. Knowing God, having a relationship with Him through Jesus is much more important than being able to list all 66 books of the Old and New Testament, or knowing the names of the 12 apostles. However, we are sadly mistaken if we think we can get to know the author of this book without reading it. The primary way God chooses to reveal Himself to us today is through the written Word of God. It is foolish to think you can find out what pleases God, and come to understand His will without studying the Bible.

Friends, in our day a lot of folks, including many Christians, think Bible study is *too much work*. Oh, maybe they pick their Bible up once in a while and read for a few minutes, but it seems confusing and boring. Besides, there are so many things to do and other ways to spend time. Yes, these folks still want to have some type of relationship with God and still want His guidance, so they look for direct spiritual experiences where they expect God to zap them, give them instant spiritual wisdom. *It doesn't work that way.* If you want to get a good grade on a math test, you don't just pray and ask God to give you instant understanding of algebra. You study, Yes, you should pray too, but without studying the good grade is unlikely to come. Some student have learned this the hard way. Friends, we will not understand the Lord's will and what pleases Him, unless we are willing to study this book. I am not suggesting you have to go to Bible college, seminary or anything like that. Just take advantage of opportunities the Lord give you to learn more about His word. Make sure you are spending at least a few minutes each day reading and meditating on scripture. Get a hold of some good books or listen to podcasts that will help you grow in your understanding of God's word. Our library has some excellent resources that will help that happen. If we are going to live as light in this dark world, we need to fill our minds with God's word, the Bible.

Second, to live as light, avoid sinful activities. **Ephesians 5:11, 12 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret.** Some of us in this church grew up under what we now call "legalism." As Baptists, we knew we were not supposed to drink, smoke, dance, go to movies or

play cards. In my home church, those all were considered sins. However, we could do things that some other Baptists had rules against. It was okay, in our church, to wear lipstick, if you were a girl, playing softball on Sunday afternoons was fine, and going swimming with people of the opposite sex, otherwise known as “mixed bathing” was not considered a problem. In fact, many folks in that church thought it was okay to gossip, use racial slurs, and hoard money as long as you refrained from the five big sins: alcohol, tobacco, dancing, movies and cards. Over time, I, and some of the rest of you, have moved away from that legalism. For me a significant event was when I learned that C. S. Lewis, a man whose books had provided a feast for my soul, both smoked a pipe and drank wine. I remember thinking, “How could someone who is a Christian do that?” Of course, he was an Anglican, not a Baptist, so he was bound to make some mistakes. However, I then learned that the prince of Baptist preachers, Charles Spurgeon, smoked cigars. In fact, many Christian leaders in the past have used alcohol and/or tobacco. Though I choose to abstain from both of those products, I now realize there is no place in the Bible that says, “Thou shalt not drink a glass of wine.”

But, as I and others have veered away from the ditch of legalism, I fear we now sometimes drive too close to the ditch on the other side, called “Libertinism.” This is where Christian liberty is abused. No, the Bible doesn’t tell us that drinking a glass of wine is wrong. Yet, it clearly teaches that drunkenness and abusing alcohol are serious sins. Alcohol abuse is doing great harm to the lives of more than a few people in our community. I suspect there were children on the Iron Range that cried themselves to sleep last night because they were home alone, since mom and dad were out drinking. As Christians we should not imitate this evil.

There are some wonderful movies in theaters that I think it would be good for Christians to see. For example, there is “American Underdog,” the story of Kurt Warner, an NFL quarterback, who is a devoted follower of Jesus. However, there are plenty of movies that a Christian really has no business spending time watching. I don’t think God is angered when parents sit down and play a card game like “Hearts” with their kids before they go to bed. Yet, I believe the Lord is angered by those parents who spend hundreds, maybe

thousands of dollars, each month at the casino and are not generous in giving to the church or sharing with those in need. Friends, we need to make sure we distinguish between human rules and God’s rules. And we need to remember that any violation of a rule that God has established is a sin. As Christians, we should have nothing to do with that. To live as light in this dark world, we need to avoid sinful activities.

Third, as we live as light, we are to make the most of opportunities God gives us. **Ephesians 5:15, 16 Look carefully then how you walk** (meaning how you live), **not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because they days are evil.** The KJV says we are to be “redeeming the time.” Folks, this is a reminder that life is meant to be more than a party. We need to have a bigger goal than “having fun.” It is important that you take life seriously. God has a purpose for you on this planet, and it is not to simply “Have a good time.” We should be intentional as we live. As Paul says, we need to be wise. We need to think about how we are using our time, energy and resources. We must avoid falling into the trap of vegging out in front of the TV night after night. We need to stay out of the rut of doing the same things, day after day, because that is what we are used to doing. We should be willing to leave our comfort zones and use the opportunities God gives us to honor Him and serve other people. And then we need to trust the Lord and be confident in Him. We must not become discouraged by the trials or even tragedies that life brings. Instead, we need to keep moving ahead, depending on the grace and strength the Lord provides and trusting that no matter what circumstances we may be in, He has a purpose for us and wants to use us for His glory. In a world full of discouraged people, we shine as lights, when other people see our enthusiasm for living under the sovereign Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Friends, are you making the most of the opportunities God is giving you in life? I love the story of two shoe salesmen who went to Africa to open new sales territories. Three days after they arrived, the first salesman faxed this message: “I will be returning on the next plane. I cannot sell shoes here. Everyone goes barefoot all the time.” There was no report from the second salesman for about two weeks. Then came a fat airmail envelope with this message for the home office: “Fifty orders enclosed. Prospects unlimited.

Nobody here has shoes.” Friends, Robert Kennedy one said, “Some men look at things as they are and ask ‘Why?’ Others look at things as they could be and ask, ‘Why not?’” Friends, that is the type of attitude God calls us to have. No, we are not to be blind optimists, ignoring the obstacles we face. Instead we are to be confident realists, trusting the Lord to help us make the most of every opportunity He gives us.

Filling our minds with God’s word, avoiding sinful activities and making the most of opportunities...that is how Paul says you let your light shine into the dark world in which you live. What is the result when the light shines? **Ephesians 5:13, 14 But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”** To wake or rise from the dead are simply ways to describe people finding spiritual life and trusting in Jesus Christ. As our light dispels the darkness, we enable other people to see the truth. This role of being a light to others is what Jesus talks about in **Matthew 5:14, 15 You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.** This is also the apostle Paul’s theme in **Philippians 2: 15, 16a So that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life.**

Now, you might think everyone will be grateful for your willingness to light the way for them. Wrong! If you are following Jesus, His light shining through your life exposes the evil around you and that includes the evil actions and attitudes of people you know. That is one of the reasons the Pharisees hated Jesus. When He was around, they could not get away with pretending they were wonderful people. **John 3:19 says, the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.** If your life is really characterized by goodness, righteousness and truth, there will be people who don’t like you, who don’t like you even if you are kind and gracious toward them, because your life will make it hard for them to convince others and

themselves that they are “okay the way they are.” When your light shines, you will not always be popular, but God will use you to help others come to know Him. And friends, there is no greater privilege in the world than being used by the Lord to help others experience God’s saving grace, by receiving Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. That is what happens when your life is a light shining in the darkness.

A couple weeks ago one of our member of Chisholm Baptist Church let her light shine brightly. Few situations are darker than the funeral of a 61-year-old husband. Yet Rachel Maki’s clear expression of faith and hope in the midst of grief, shone so brightly and so beautifully that day. Besides the almost 300 people that were there for the funeral service, the YouTube recording now has over 500 views. And from numerous comments I have heard, the Lord is using Rachel’s testimony and the entire funeral service as a light that encourages folks struggling in darkness. Friends, you too have the opportunity to let your light shine. It probably won’t involve speaking in front of hundreds of people, but the words you speak to a friend, the attitude you demonstrate at work, the thing you do to help a neighbor, are all ways for your light to shine. Ask the Lord to enable you to shine brightly, by His grace and for His glory.