

“CHILDREN OF LIGHT IN A DARK WORLD” **(Ephesians 5:7-14)**

Today as we continue our study of the book of Ephesians, I want to talk to you about being children of light in a dark world. How many of you have ever been to the Oregon Caves? I used to go there often as a kid and it held special interest to me because the man who discovered the caves, Elijah Davidson, lived in the small community of Williams where I grew up, and some of his descendants still lived on Davidson Road, a couple of miles up the road from where I lived.

In 1874 Davidson was hunting 22 miles east of what would become the city of Cave Junction. After shooting a deer, his Airedale dog Bruno took off after a bear and followed it into a cave. He heard his dog yelp, and without much time to think he went into the cave to save his favorite dog. He grabbed some matches from his pouch and lit them as he ventured further into the cave. When he came down to his last matches, he decided he'd better turn around and go back. But in his rush to find his dog he did not keep track of which passageways he had used. Eventually he used his last match and was left in total darkness. He had no idea where he was and where the bear was.

As he sat there in total darkness he began to think about his family and how he would die alone in the cave and they would never know what happened to him. But then he heard the sound of water, and he knew that if he could get to the water, he could follow it out of the cave. To get to the water he had to crawl through some very narrow passages and didn't know if he would get stuck or turned around. He eventually found the stream of water and put one foot in front of the other and he followed it. For three hours he felt his way through total darkness and finally made his way out of the cave. And, by the way, his dog made it out alive as well and found Davidson later that day.

Today when you visit Oregon Caves the guide will stop at a certain point in the cave and have all the lights turned off to let you experience for just a moment what Elijah Davidson felt for several hours. It's a little spooky. Most of us have never been in total, black darkness. The guide will say, "Wave your hand in front of your face." You can't see any movement at all. It's an overwhelming feeling. Imagine what Elijah Davidson must have thought when he saw the light at the opening of the cave – once he stepped into the light, he probably never set foot in a dark cave again.

The theme of light and darkness is found throughout the Bible, starting in the first chapter of Genesis and continuing all the way to the last chapter of Revelation. God is light, and on the first day of creation He said, "Let there be light." In the eternal state of heaven there will be no more night, only the light of God.

In the Bible light and darkness are used in two ways. First, light represents **truth**, and darkness represents **ignorance**. Light enables you to see what's real and adjust your life accordingly, while darkness keeps you locked in ignorance and confusion. Secondly, light represents **holiness**, and darkness represents **evil**. To live in the light is to live a moral life pleasing to God, while to live in darkness is to practice sin and evil. The Bible presents light and darkness as polar opposites – there is no neutral ground spiritually – you're either living in light or living in darkness.

The problem humanity faces is that we are born into spiritual darkness, and eternally separated from God. This explains the chaos we see in the world today – without the light of God, sin and evil thrive – and without God's intervention we are eternally lost in darkness.

All that changed on Christmas morning. In John 8:12 Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” Jesus came to earth to turn the light on, to show us the way to God and redeem us from sin.

The main idea of our passage today is that once you and I become children of light, we are to live in the light and have nothing to do with the darkness. Throughout the book of Ephesians the Apostle Paul has been contrasting our old life of sin and our new life in Christ – you were once that, and now you are this. In the first six verses of chapter 5 he tells us to imitate God and not the world, and now in verses 7-14 he gives directives on how to live as light in a dark world.

Beginning in verse 7 he writes, “Therefore do not be partners with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. This is why it is said: ‘Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.’”

The main phrase around which everything in this passage revolves is: Live as children of light. This interesting phrase reveals two things about our new identity in Christ. First is the fact that we are God’s *children*. The moment you trust Christ as your Savior from sin you are spiritually born again and adopted into God’s family. Where once you were alienated and separated from God, you now are welcomed into His family with all the rights and privileges of being His child.

Secondly, we are children of *light*. Before Christ we were spiritually in the dark – we had little or no awareness of God or desire to please Him – our focus was completely set on this present world, and gave little thought about life beyond this life or where we would spend eternity. Without receiving light from God we are forever locked in darkness.

The prophet Isaiah looked forward to the coming of the Messiah and said, “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned” (Isaiah 9:2). Jesus came to turn the light on and show us the way to God. Light is one of the best illustrations of spiritual conversion. The Holy Spirit turns the light on by convicting us of sin and our need for a Savior, and draws us to Christ. At the moment we believe in Christ we are born again into God’s family, and as Colossians 1:13 says, we are transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light.

Once we become children of light, we are to walk in the light – and in these verses the Apostle Paul tells us what that means by describing five things we are to do as children of light...

Number one, **as children of light we are to separate ourselves from darkness.** Verse 7-8a says, “Therefore do not be partners with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.” One of the great challenges of being a Christian is learning how to live as light in a dark world. As you grow in Christ and get closer to the light, the more aware you become of the darkness, and it’s obvious to see that our world is getting darker by the hour. I think of Isaiah 5:20 that says, “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet.” Apart from Christ there is no moral compass, and people decide for themselves what is right and what is wrong.

Throughout the Bible God's calls His people to be distinct from the world that does not know God. In the OT He called Israel to be set apart from the other nations by the way they lived, by the way they dressed, by who they married, and by who they worshipped. The same command to be set apart from the world is repeated to believers in the NT. 2 Corinthians 6:14 says, "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?"

Light and darkness are two separate entities. The weatherman doesn't say, "Tonight's forecast calls for scattered areas of darkness." Light is light and dark is dark, and they cannot coexist. Now that we're children of light, Paul says, we're not to be "partners" with those who live in the darkness of sin. As Proverbs says, "Bad company corrupts good character."

Being partners has the idea of aligning ourselves with the world living in opposition to God. James 4:4 says, "Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God." Once we become part of God's family, we are to leave the ways of the world behind. Like the song says, "The world behind me, the cross before me, no turning back."

At the same time, Jesus said that we are to be the salt and light of the world and not hide our light under a bushel. Not being partners with the world does not mean retreating from the world. Jesus was called "the friend of sinners." He spent time with sinners and reached out in love to rescue them from the clutches of sin. As believers we live with the tension of being *in* the world, but not *of* the world – of influencing the world, but not becoming like the world. If we retreat from the world, how will they see the light? And if we are just like the world, how will they see any difference between us and the world? God has called us to separate from the world and to influence the world at the same time.

As children of light we can no longer partner with the world, because the world is headed in the opposite direction. Amos 3:3 says, "Can two people walk together without agreeing on the direction?" As children of light we are to walk with those who are also walking in the light – our closest friends and allies should be with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. This is especially true when it comes to who you marry – God's will is that you marry a fellow believer, someone who walks in the light as you do. If you're already married to an unbeliever, God's will is for you to be a godly influence in your marriage and show them the way to God by the way you live.

In verse 9 we see, secondly, that **as children of light we are to produce the fruit of light**. Paul writes, "For the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth." Light produces growth. The radiant energy of the sun activates the chemical compounds in plants that cause them to grow and produce fruit. My dad, who was a farmer, pointed out how everything grows upwards towards the sun, and you can find flowers that actually bend towards the sun. In the same way it's only natural that children of light, who live in the light, are going to produce spiritual fruit.

Verse 9 mentions three examples of fruit, beginning with *goodness*. Goodness is being a person of moral excellence who acts to benefit others. Moral excellence means you consistently live by God's moral standards, and you have the courage and conviction to stick by those standards even when everyone else around you may live by a different standard. A person with moral excellence will not just strive to be a good person, but will seek to do good to others. Jesus said that good deeds is one of the primary ways we shine light in a dark world – when you do something good for someone it demonstrates God's love and provides an opportunity for you to share the gospel.

Next is the fruit of *righteousness*. This means that you do what is right. Righteousness is a result of salvation – in our fallen state we have no clear standard of right and wrong – but now that we have received the righteousness of Christ, we know the right way to live and have the power to do what is right.

The third example of the fruit of light is *truth*. Living in truth means that you have nothing to hide. It's like when you go to the airport and send your luggage through the X-ray machine – if you don't have a bomb or weapon, you have nothing to be nervous about. Living in truth means you when your life is scrutinized by others, you have nothing to fear because you live with honesty and integrity – you are the same person in private as you are in public.

If you are walking in the light, the natural result will be fruit. Jesus said that you will know a true Christian by their fruit – when you see goodness and righteousness and truth – when you see change and growth – you know someone is living in the light.

Number three, in verse 10 we see that **as children of the light we are to discern what pleases God**. Paul writes, “Find out what pleases the Lord.” When we lived in darkness apart from God, we lived to please ourselves and satisfy our sinful desires, but once we step into the light, God gives us a new desire to please Him and to make sure we discern what it is He wants us to do.

The primary way we find out what pleases God is by the Word of God. Psalm 119:105 says, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (ESV). Without a lamp, without a light, we have no idea where to go, but God's Word illuminates our way in a dark world. Through the Word, we renew our minds from a worldly mindset to a godly mindset, and submit ourselves to whatever God's Word tells us to do.

There are hundreds of direct statements in scripture of what God wants us to do – many of them right here in Ephesians – it is God's will that we tell the truth, that we work hard, that we remain sexually pure, and that we forgive others. God's Word also warns of many things not to do – we are not to steal or lie or let bitterness fester inside us. Along with hundreds of direct commands, God's Word also provides general principles to guide us, many of which we learn from the life experiences of people in the Bible. As we immerse ourselves in the Word, God will reveal His will to us.

As believers we also have the Holy Spirit to show us what pleases God. Before Jesus returned to heaven, He promised to send the Holy Spirit to dwell inside us and guide us into all truth (John 16:13). Galatians 5 says that we are to keep in step with the Spirit – to be aware of His presence – and yield control of our lives to Him.

Another source of light God provides us is the wise counsel of fellow believers who have lived in the light for a number of years. Proverbs 11:14 says there is safety in a multitude of counselors. If you are unsure of what God wants you to do in a certain situation, it is wise seek the counsel of a seasoned Christian and see what God has to say through them.

Living as a child of light in a dark world can be difficult and confusing, but through the light of the Word of God, the Spirit of God, and the people of God we can discern what pleases God.

As children of light we are to separate ourselves from darkness, we are to bear the fruit of light, we are to discern what pleases God, and number four, **we are to expose the deeds of darkness**. Verses 11-12 says, “Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret.”

As believers we are to so distance ourselves from the darkness that we don't even talk about what is done in the dark. We shouldn't want to know about the sordid private lives of celebrities, or watch videos or shows that glorify bad behavior. Romans 16:19 says we are to wise to what is good, and innocent to what is evil. It's okay to be naïve to what happens in the dark.

Rather than participating in the sinful deeds of darkness, we are to expose the darkness. The nature of light is to reveal what the darkness hides. Evil men, the Bible says, “do their deeds in darkness.” The vast majority of crimes are committed at night, under the cover of darkness to conceal what is being done. Even people who are normally law-abiding citizens will do things under the cover of darkness if there is no fear that they will be caught.

But when there is light, there is accountability. One of the first things police will do when they come to a crime scene is to check to see if there are cameras in the area that might reveal who the culprit is – cameras don't lie and many criminals have been caught by what the camera revealed.

Rather than participate with the fruitless deeds of darkness, we are to expose them. This doesn't mean that we go around as moral crusaders pointing out every sin and flaw in non-believers. It means that by simply by living a holy, moral life we will expose the sin of those living in darkness. Our light-filled lives will provoke one of two reactions.

One is hostility. Listen to how Peter describes it in 1 Peter 4:3-4, “For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you.” Not only does the world not understand you, they feel judged by you – even though you're not – and your morals and values make them feel guilty.

This explains why some people steer clear of church, and why, if you start to even mention God or the Bible, that they immediately throw up their hands and say, “I don't want to talk about it.” They don't want to hear that anything that might expose their sin. Jesus said, “This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed” (John 3:19-20).

The longer a person lives in spiritual darkness, the more they get used to it. It's like when you walk into a dark restaurant and you can't even hardly see the menu, much less what food is set before you. But after 10 or 15 minutes your eyes become adjusted to the darkness. God wants to shine the light of the gospel on every heart so that they can see their true spiritual condition and be rescued from sin.

Jesus promised that children of light will be persecuted, but in ways we don't always see or realize, our lives have a positive effect on the world. This leads us to the fifth way we live as children of light – **we are to convert darkness into light**. Verses 13-14 says, “But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light.”

Light not only exposes, it transforms. God has left us on earth to be His light to a dark world, and you may be the only light someone sees. We are not the light, but a reflection of God's light. When you look up in the sky at night, you can't see the sun, but you see the bright beam of the moon. The moon has no light itself – it merely reflects the light of the sun. In the same way, now that Christ has gone back to heaven and is not visible – people see Christ through us.

As we shine the light of Christ on a dark world, some people will be convicted of sin, turn to Christ, and become a light themselves! This is why we keep shining the light even when some react with hostility, because some will see our witness and example and be transformed.

Whether you realize it or not, people are watching you – they're watching to see if your walk matches your talk – they're watching to see if there's any reason they should listen to your message. In 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 Paul says, “Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders” (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12). Every day as you go about your business, as you go to school or go to work or go to a meeting, win the respect of people by quietly living the kind of life that they will respect.

In verse 14 Paul illustrates the incredible transformation light brings by citing a well-known saying in the early church based on Isaiah 60:1... “This is why it is said: ‘Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.’” This invitation is given to both unbelievers and believers. To unbelievers we are to issue a call for them to wake up and see the light – turn from their sins and receive new life in Christ. Maybe that describes you – as you listen to God's Word this morning perhaps He is making you aware of your sin and your need to trust Christ. Today, through God's power, you can be transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light.

It's also an invitation to believers who might be living a lifestyle of darkness. In Romans 13:11-13 Paul issued a similar wake-up call to believers... “And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.”

God only gives us so many days to shine as lights on the earth, and we must not be lulled to sleep by the moral darkness of the world, but be spiritually alert and engaged in living as children of light. Perhaps God's Word has revealed that you are still dabbling in the darkness and not being a light to others. If so, confess your sin to God and get back to living according to your identity – live as a child of light in a dark world.