

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (4-8-1996 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

Ephesians 5:8-14

Additional reading: 2 Corinthians 4:1-7; 6:14-7:1

Walk as Children of Light

Introduction

Now Paul goes on to explain why the Christian should have no part in the seamy side of life, described in v.3-7. He explains why we are diametrically different from the world, complete opposites, because our very being has been changed. Our relationship with the Lord has drastically altered us, and given us an entirely different outlook and set of values.

We are light, they are darkness. We are alive, they are dead. They are separate from Christ, we are in Christ. They are without hope and without God, we are full of hope and belong to God.

The picture used here of darkness versus light is a very common picture in the Bible to describe the world and the people of God. We are going to look at this description, the result it has in our lives, and how we should respond to darkness.

The Christian as light in the world

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord (Ephesians 5:8). Not merely walking in darkness, but actually had darkness in us. Not just our environment, but our very beings and personalities were darkness. Paul gave an explanation for this earlier – how our understanding, or mind, was darkened. The non-Christian is ignorant, his mind is blinded, he does not know God and the truth about Him. He does not understand salvation or why Christ came. Darkness has affected his emotions, he does not want to hear the truth, and he hates it. **This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil** (John 3:19).

Their will was affected, they freely and deliberately choose **the acts of the sinful nature** (Galatians 5:19). These are the things which sell newspapers – but they are **the fruitless deeds of darkness** (Ephesians 5:11). A life lived like that has no value, it is empty and artificial. It takes money and energy, but it leads nowhere except to death. These things are no help during the great issues of life – during illness, facing death and eternity. No wonder, in the parable of the rich fool, when the man's soul is required of him that night, and his plans for future enjoyment are brought to an end, God says "You fool" **This is how it will be for anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich towards God** (Luke 12:21).

That is what the Christian once was, and what the non-Christian still is. **But now you are light in the Lord**. The Lord Jesus described Himself as **The Light of the World** (John 8:12). **The light shines in the darkness** (John 1:5). **For God who said "Let light shine out of darkness" made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ** (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Called out of darkness into His wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9). **Turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God** (Acts 26:18).

But Jesus also described the Christian as light: **You are the light of the world** (Matthew 5:14). A light transmitter reflects the true light as the moon reflects the sun. Light has irradiated the whole being. Now the Christian has the knowledge and understanding of God. He has a love for Him, and His word and His truth. The whole of his life is bent towards pleasing Him and being holy. This is the absolute difference between the non-Christian and the Christian. Death v life. Darkness v light. A radical change has taken place. Not just washed his face and changed his suit, but a new birth, new person, and a new creation. For some, the change is gradual, for some, it is sudden. But all Christians can say “I am no longer this, but I am now that”.

How and why has this taken place? The Lord is the secret and the reason for this dramatic transformation. We are nothing without Him. He is the secret. Joined to Him, belonging to Him, being branches in the vine, “In Christ”. He fills us with His light and power. We are not just looking at the light, but the light is in us. We are entirely and exclusively in Jesus Christ, and He is in us.

There is no middle ground, He is either in us or not. No twilight zone. Are you dead or alive? Saved or lost? Belong to Satan and the world, or to Christ? Darkness or light? Can you say “I now am light in the Lord”?

Responsibility to live as children of the light

Earlier we were told to walk in love. Now we are told to walk in the light. And this means four things. The first aspect of walking in the light is following after all goodness. Goodness is love in action, one of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). Being anxious not to harm another, being careful about our influence over another, being careful that we do not cause them to stumble. We are but a pale reflection – **The Lord is good to all** (Psalm 145:9). **He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous** (Matthew 5:45). So goodness is not self-centred or selfish. It is concerned with others, and generous and warm towards them. It wants to alleviate suffering and end wrongs. It wants to help and improve people’s lot.

The second aspect is righteousness. Doing right by God and man. **So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man** (Acts 24:16). Owing nothing to either party, fair, just, upright in dealings, respectful of other’s possessions, careful to keep God’s law. Not every man for himself.

Thirdly, truth. Reliability and integrity. No sham or hypocrisy or deceit. Transparency, nothing to hide. No skeletons in the cupboard. An author asked C.H.Spurgeon for permission to write his life story, and the reply was “You may write my life in the skies – I have nothing to hide.” Jesus said of Nathanael: **Here is a true Israelite in whom there is nothing false** (John 1:47).

Finally, walking in the light involves finding out what is acceptable or pleasing to the Lord. God spoke of His Son at His baptism and at His transfiguration thus: **This is my Son, whom I love. With Him I am well pleased** (Matthew 17:5). The Christian

longs that God will be well pleased with him. This is the distinguishing mark of the Christian – the non-Christian may be concerned to be seen by others to be good and righteous and truthful, but only the Christian is concerned with the Lord's opinion of his actions. The test of his actions is not whether it earns him praise from other people, but whether it is pleasing and glorifying to God. The Christian owes everything to God. He has been bought with a price.

When people are light in the Lord, God produces fruit in their lives. They are His workmanship – shown in goodness, righteousness, truthfulness and a desire to please God.

Reaction of the Light to the Darkness

How should the Christian live in a world where so many are darkness. Instinctive reaction is to want to escape and run away. But God's purpose is that we should be salt and light. We cannot be that if we become hermits and isolate ourselves. The Lord prayed: **My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one** (John 17:15). Therefore Paul here says **Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them** (Ephesians 5:11). No compromise, no coming to terms with darkness. **Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers** (Psalm 1:1). But we are to **Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven** (Matthew 5:16).

How the light exposes – whether it be dust and dirt, or the bumps on a road surface on a dark night. Someone carefully matching colours will take the cloth into the natural light of the sun, rather than judge it by electric light. So our lives, lived in the light of God, should please Him and should be consistent, and then without even speaking a word, the difference will show up. Our language, outlook, values will be so different that people will make the comparison, at least mentally, and notice and feel ashamed by the difference.

This is often the reason why the Christian, like Christ Himself, is resented and hated – even if he hasn't spoken a word. People feel uncomfortable, convicted, ashamed because of the difference in the life. **If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first** (John 15:18). **If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin** (John 15:22). This is one of the reasons why people avoid Christians, churches, and the Bible.

We need to be prepared to speak out about wrong-doing. Not in superior tones, nor acting a moral spics and detectives. But it is wrong to be silent. Difficult to avoid being misunderstood. Help here from the Lord's example. He did not cut Himself off from sinners. He was called the friend of tax collectors and sinners (Matthew 11:19). He sat with them and had meals with them. They drew near, and He mixed with them. He did not reject them. But He acted in such a way that He did not share in their wrong-doing or show approval in any way. So we have to make clear our interest and concern for the non-Christian, and share some interests with them – but show that we are not interested in what is harmful and sinful. Then, not just denounce or reprimand – but apply the Gospel. Explain what they are really doing and how this is a danger to

their immortal soul. Then lovingly throw light of the Gospel onto the situation. Talk about ourselves and our souls and our relationship to God. Throw the light of the Gospel and show its relevance on the whole situation. Christ not just denounced but expressed the love and concern of God for these people in their awful plight. At the same time explain the change which has come to us, and what we have found in Christ. Important also to testify to positive benefits – peace of mind, joy (which will be revelation to them because they think ours is a miserable and unhappy life).

Conclusion

The Christian is light in the Lord. He walks as a child of light, not having anything to do with the fruitless works of darkness. This passage ends with an early Christian hymn (suggested by the rhythm in the original language), sung when people were baptised and emerging from the water: **Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you** (Ephesians 5:14). This is an appeal to all unconverted, but also to the Christian to live life consistent with their new position in Christ.