

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Now that we are Christians, how shall we live? That, in summary, is the question St. Paul addresses in the second half of his Letter to the Ephesians. What difference does being a Christian make in the way we live our lives? In the previous chapter Paul put it in terms of "putting off your old self" - what not to wear - and "putting on the new self", the new you, created in Christ Jesus. In today's text, Paul continues this general theme, but he changes the imagery. Instead of using the image of taking off and putting on clothing, today Paul draws a sharp contrast between darkness and light. He tells us, very clearly: "You were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light." What this means for our lives is what we will now explore, and we implore the Lord's blessing that the meaning will become reality for each one of us.

I - "You were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light." The contrast between darkness and light is familiar imagery in the Bible. It's all over the place, from Genesis to Revelation. Darkness is associated with the state of this world - shrouded in the darkness of ignorance and sin and unbelief. Light, on the other hand, is the language of life and knowledge and righteousness. One is the fallen state of man apart from God. One is the graced condition of God's own people. Darkness and light, old and new, lost and saved, dead and alive, outsiders and insiders - the Bible uses all of these contrasting pairs to talk about life apart from Christ and life now in Christ, and Paul uses all of these images in Ephesians. Now it is darkness and light. We'll look at both of these, how Paul describes each of these states, and we'll begin to see how this gives guidance to how we will live in the days ahead.

II - We start with darkness. And indeed, that was our starting point. Like all the rest of the world, we were in the darkness. In fact, Paul puts it more strongly than that: "You were darkness," he says. Not

just, “You were in the darkness,” but “You were darkness.” Darkness was in our very nature - our fallen sinful nature, corrupted by original sin, lacking the true knowledge and fear of God. That is who we were: Darkness. That is how the world is, the values of this world, the world system, which is aligned against God and his ways.

How does Paul describe this world of darkness? I think we can cover it in three words: disobedient, deceptive, and deadly. All three points are made in this one verse: “Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.” - The darkness of this world is disobedient. Paul calls the children of this world “the sons of disobedience.” That is their natural condition and character, passed down from generation to generation, going back to our first parents and their original disobedience in the garden. “The sons of disobedience”: That’s who the world is; that’s who we were. The children of this world do not hearken to the voice of God. They do not listen to what He says. They ignore and reject His Word. That’s what it is to disobey. It is a personal sin; it is rebellion against God himself. And it takes shape then in the breaking of His commandments - commandments God gives to us for our own good, because He knows what is best for us. He created us, after all. But the sons of disobedience think they know better than their Creator. That is real darkness. How clueless do you have to be to think you know better than God? But that is what the sons of disobedience do.

The darkness is disobedient. It is also deceptive. It would even try to deceive us Christians, try to pull us back into the darkness. That’s why Paul tells us: “Let no one deceive you with empty words.” The world would whisper in our ear: “Aw, come on! Nobody’s watching. And it’s all right. Times have changed. Don’t be so uptight and judgmental! You deserve to have some fun!” This is how the world speaks to us, isn’t it? The messages we get in the pop culture, through the mass media, the voices in the government, in education, in the movies, on television, in advertising - all of them are telling us: “There are no more standards of right and wrong. Do whatever you

like, whatever makes you feel happy. You're worth it." - These are just variations on an old theme. The original deceiver whispered the same message into the ears of Adam and Eve. And we fell for it. Fell hard. Fell into sin. And we've been falling for it ever since. The darkness is deceptive.

And it is deadly. Just as the original deception brought the original disobedience, so that disobedience brought death into the picture. The wages of sin is death. Or, as Paul puts it here in Ephesians: "for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience." The wrath of God is His judgment, His righteous anger poured out on rebel mankind. The darkness is the realm of death, death under God's wrath. It comes on men now, in time. It will come definitively and finally and eternally at the Last Day.

That's why Paul warns us about going back into the darkness, getting matched up again with and influenced by the sons of disobedience, and taking part in what he calls "the unfruitful works of darkness." "Because of these things," the wrath of God comes. What things? What are these works of darkness? In the verses leading up to our text, Paul has just mentioned some examples. He especially mentions sexual immorality and covetousness. There are other works of darkness, but these are prime examples. Sexual immorality, for instance: This covers a whole waterfront of impurity. And this is where the deceptive nature of the darkness comes in. Think of all the behaviours the world now says are OK but God's word still says are wrong - things like homosexuality, adultery, divorce, living together outside of marriage, pornography. "Because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience." But the world, our contemporary culture, would deceive us into condoning these works of darkness, or even taking part in them ourselves.

III - But that is not who you are, not anymore. Paul continues: "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 (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and

true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.” Now we see everything in a new light. Now we are in the light. Even more, now we are light. “Now you are light in the Lord,” Paul says. Therefore, “walk as children of light.”

We described the darkness in three words: disobedient, deceptive, and deadly. Now let’s describe the light with three different words: wakened, walking, and wise.

First, wakened. We were dead when we were darkness, before we knew Christ. But now we have been wakened, wakened from the dead. Paul quotes from what must have been an early Christian hymn: “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” That’s us! That’s what happened to us, when God woke us up, gave us the great wake-up call. We were out of it, asleep, dead, unconscious, snoozing away in the dark, oblivious to what the real reality was, the way things lay between God and us. But God called us and woke us up, awakened us from the slumber of spiritual death. God called us by the gospel, raised us up from the dead through His life-giving Word, and brought us to living faith in Christ. “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” Yes, Jesus Christ is the Light of the world, and he shines his life-giving light on us.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never, and will never, overcome it. The light of Christ shone in the darkness on that dark Friday, when darkness covered the land, during those hours when Christ was hanging on the cross. For in that darkness, God’s own Son was taking the judgment and the wrath that we deserved, suffering it in our place. The Saviour of mankind, Jesus Christ, took all your sins, all of your death, and died to take them off of you. And it worked! When Christ arose on Easter morning, a new day dawned for all who trust in Him. His light of life disperses our darkness. In Baptism, the light becomes ours, as we are joined to Christ. Baptism is our “enlightening.” The Holy Spirit enlightens our minds and souls with new light. We are wakened.

And now we start walking. “Walking” is the Bible’s way of saying how you live, how you conduct your life in a consistent manner. And Paul here tells us, “Walk as children of light.” You have the light within you. You are light now, in connection with the Lord. So walk in the light. Conduct your life now in a manner fitting for children of light.

This calls for wisdom, wise living. Wisdom is knowledge applied. It is sound judgment, right decision-making. What is the will of the Lord? How would He have us live? What “goes” with being a Christian? Certainly, God’s commandments give us the broad strokes, what to do, what not to do. The power to live that way of course comes from the Gospel, from the power of the Spirit and the new life in Christ. But the shape of that life will conform to the will of God expressed in His holy commandments. This is the way that is good and right and true. This is walking in the light, walking as children of light. We can see the right path to walk in, what it looks like. Your internal sensor will warn you when you’re veering off course. Listen to that divine GPS. It’s the Holy Spirit, speaking to you through the Word you have heard preached and taught. As a Christian, you can tell the difference between the darkness and the light. Stay where it’s light.

Conclusion: The darkness is disobedient, deceptive, and deadly. Don’t go there. The light is who you are: wakened from the dead, walking in the way of righteousness, wise in discerning the will of the Lord. Oh, and one more thing about the light: It’s joyful! There is real joy in walking as children of light. When you think about all that God has done in delivering us out of the domain of darkness and transferring us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, bringing us into the light - well, it makes your spirit sing! And so we’ll close on that joyful note: “Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

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