

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

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Sermon Text: Ephesians 5:8-20
Sermon Title: "You Are Light"

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{SLIDE 1} Last week we talked about the New Year, and how God has given us a new year with fresh starts and fresh paths. The old year is past, and so are the lifestyles that we got so used to, lifestyles that were partially opposite to what God wills for us. God calls us to let go of our desires, our wishes, our yearnings, especially if they are self-centered, painful, and destructive. God gives us a new pattern to follow this year, and we have the chance to follow it with God walking beside us, teaching us along the way.

{SLIDE 2} The disciple Paul has a way of describing the old and the new. He tells the Ephesians in Chapter 5 that the old is darkness. He tells the Ephesians that the new is light.

What is darkness? It isn't necessarily the lack of light. What I mean is, darkness is not the lack of having a lightbulb turned on or a candle lit in a room. The kind of darkness Paul is speaking of should not be compared to the night with no stars or moon or traffic lights around. Paul uses a certain Greek word for

darkness, and the meaning is obscurity, insignificance, vagueness, even doubt. To be obscure means to be unnoticeable, means to be without form or texture. To be obscure means that nobody knows, and possibly nobody cares. That is a dark place to be in, a place where nobody seems to see us or think about us, or even choose to help us.

Notice that when Paul uses the word *darkness* in verse 8, he doesn't say that the Ephesians were once *in* darkness. He says that they *were* darkness. They were obscure. They were doubtful, vague, insignificant, unnoticeable. This is what sins does to us. Sin puts us in a place in which nobody recognizes us, but would rather ignore us and walk away. Sin puts us in a place, in which we don't even recognize ourselves anymore, and if we had the chance we would walk away from ourselves, too.

{SLIDE 3} Yet Paul tells the Ephesians and tells us that we are not darkness anymore. We are light because of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because we are in the Lord we are made light.

What is light? We should not think that it is similar to turning on a lightbulb or lighting a candle. The light Paul talks about should not be compared to day and thus be the opposite of night. The Greek word

Paul uses means to make manifest. To make manifest is an old religious term meaning to be made obvious, to be made clear, to be made visible. Whereas darkness – the darkness of sin – means to make us unnoticeable, the light makes us noticeable, recognizable, to all and even to us.

{SLIDE 4} In the Lord we are light. We are made to be the children of the light, which is what we should have been from the start. We who are light are given God’s own qualities such as goodness, righteousness, and truth.¹ At some point Paul will tell the Colossians that, as children of the light, they are to put on compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, forgiving each other, and loving one another.² We do all these things because they are pleasing to God, and it is our heart’s desire as children of light to please God and enjoy God forever.³

We are light, and so we are not obscure. We are not doubtful, not insignificant, not unnoticeable. Everybody recognizes us, and we recognize ourselves. And God recognizes us, and makes us light for the world.

¹ Klyne Snodgrass, *The NIV Application Commentary: Ephesians*, cf. 271.

² Colossians 3:13-14.

³ *The Book of Confession (PCUSA)*, “The Shorter Catechism,” 7.001.

{SLIDE 5} Now there is a problem, only because we want to make it a problem. Paul says that in the Lord we are light. We therefore should live as children of light. No problem: Put off the old, the darkness of sin; and put on the new, the light of God. Paul says that we should try to find out constantly what is pleasing to God. Do those things that a loving and truthful and good. It takes some work. No problem. Except, as we are working at it, Paul says in verses 11-13 that we “take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead *expose* them. For it is shame to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible. Everything that becomes visible is light.”

This is where the problem lay, because we make it a problem. We may not want to expose the darkness in our lives. We are okay with exposing, bringing to light, some of our sin, some of those things that hurt others, ourselves, and God. But we don't want to reveal it all. We want to keep some of the darkness hidden.

Why is that? Maybe because we don't want people knowing everything about us. We want to keep certain things hidden from view. We don't want to talk about it, and so we don't mention it. The president-elect hasn't disclosed his annual tax forms, because he

doesn't want us to know about his business dealings, good and dangerous. A company will not disclose all of its losses, because it does not want to scare away business. A spouse keeps certain things from his or her spouse, because he or she just wants to keep those things hidden, and thinks it's no big deal. We don't want people "getting' all up in our business," as the kids say today. So we keep things hidden, quiet, on the down low, even some of our sin.

{SLIDE 6} Maybe we are embarrassed by some of the things we have done or said. We cannot believe we said it. We cannot believe we did it. If we were in our right minds, things would have gone differently. We wouldn't have hurt somebody's feelings. We wouldn't have broken that certain thing, or lost that other thing. We just would have had more sense. But we didn't for whatever reasons, and we are ashamed, embarrassed. We just want to forget it and never think of it again. Talking about it only brings it to the surface and embarrasses us once more. We don't like the humiliating feelings. We don't like the voice in our heads that says, "Well, that was really stupid, wasn't it? You should have had more sense, shouldn't you have had?" We just want to keep it hidden and forget it.

Some of our sin is like that: couldn't we just forget

it. Couldn't we just put it down as a one-time slip and move on from there? God would want us to do that, right? God would want us to hide the sin and be unable to remember for the rest of our lives, right? That would be the best thing, at least it is the best thing for our pride.

{SLIDE 7} Or, maybe we keep our sin hidden because we like it too much. We desire it. It feels too good. It makes us very happy. It's got to be right, we convince ourselves. We have to have more. We don't want anybody telling us to stop. We don't want God getting in the way. Leave us alone. Let me have this one vice. Just this one. Sadly, one hidden vice turns into two and three and many more that we keep hidden, and then we end up being darkness once more.

{SLIDE 8} Paul says that we are children of light in the Lord. We are light, taking on God's good qualities. We are light, because there is no darkness in us. There is no sin interrupting the light that we shine. There is no dark sin causing an obstacle between us and God. If there is, it has to be exposed. Light has to come to the darkness, for the darkness will not understand it. The darkness will not stand it, and will fade away. We don't get a pass on this. "Everything

exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light... Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you.”⁴

Yet, how is this done? How do we expose the darkness within and receive more light from God? It isn't an action we take lightly, and it isn't an action we just perform in front of anybody.

The main question we ask ourselves is: To whom do we expose our sin? To whom do we say that there is darkness within us that need to become visible? King David, in Psalm 51 said to God, “Against you, and you alone, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight...”⁵ If all sin is ultimately an offense against God, then it is God who needs to hear our confession. It is God we approach with our sin and expose it.

{SLIDE 9} We find a quiet place. Practically anywhere would do. It could be here in the sanctuary when nobody is around. It could be in some quiet corner of our houses where we know we will not be disturbed. You may laugh, but the bathroom is definitely a place we won't be disturbed, so it is an excellent place for devotions. It may be in our cars going to work or coming home, with the radio off and the phone on silence. Find that a place with God. Find a period of time to spend with God. Speak softly

⁴ Ephesians 5:13, 14.

⁵ Verse 4.

to yourself if you need to, or just think the words. And confess the sin to God. Open yourself to God in that private and intimate moment. Leave nothing back. Dump it all at the feet of God. God knows it anyhow, so we might as well admit it.

If it is living an unwise life, as Paul says to the Ephesians, then confess it to God privately.⁶ If we have made some bad decisions, if we have reacted hurtfully toward someone, if we have been unwise in the ways we carry ourselves, then give the sin over to God and ask for wisdom. Ask God to help us make right decision, say right words, and live the right life, the life God give us through Jesus Christ.

If it is drunkenness, as Paul puts it, then confess to God.⁷ If we think having a good time requires having too many, then we have a problem. If we are moved by alcoholic spirits more so than the Holy Spirit, then we have a problem. We need the help of God to keep us sober. We need to admit the sin to God and seek healthy solutions with God walking beside us.

Paul only lists two sin that would cause the Ephesians to fall back into darkness, obscurity. Our sins might not be listed, but whatever it is we do not want it or them to interrupt our relationship with God.

⁶ Cf. Ephesians 5:15-17.

⁷ Cf. Ephesians 5:18

Reveal the darkness. Believe that God will shed light on it. Believe that God will make it visible for us to see and admit, and then the light of God will make the sin vanish. God will clean our hearts, and put a new and right spirit in us.⁸

{SLIDE 10} We are light. It is a motto we need to carry around with us in the New Year. We are light in the Lord. Paul wanted the Ephesians to believe it and make it a part of their DNA. You are light, he told them. We are light, as well.

In this New Year we can live as light. We can bear the fruit of light and become even more so children of light. It takes some doing every signal day. It takes believing and practicing every single day. And we can be light, because God through Christ makes us light. We are light, because this is what God created us to be.

⁸ Cf. Psalm 51:

The Assurance of Pardon:

The psalmist reminds us in Psalm 40 the theme of redemption: “I waited patiently for the Lord, who inclined his ear and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the desolate pit, out of the muck and mire.” Through Christ, God the Father sets our feet on solid ground. Through Christ, the Holy Spirit puts a new song of love and peace in our mouths. Through Christ, we see and fear God, for we are all forgiven. Thanks be to God! Amen.