

<Read Text: Eph 5:8-14>

I think when you first start reading this section, it sounds pretty good to us, doesn't it? It's actually pretty complimentary. Hey, we're light! Children of light! And we're not like those people who do stuff in the dark. It's shameful even to talk about them. Yes. We can hold our heads high and be proud of what we are and what we are not. As long as we don't think too hard about what this is really saying. It's in our sinful nature to read good into ourselves, but that's not exactly what Paul is saying here.

It's particularly the part that says **"but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible."** That's when I start to get a little uncomfortable. I mean at first, you just sort of read over that. Of course, light makes things visible. That's what it does. You can't see anything without light. The rays shoot out from the light bulb or sun or wherever and when they hit a surface, some of the colors bounce off. Those parts that bounce off go into our eyes and are interpreted by our brain. Without light, everything is black. Without light, nothing can be seen.

But where things start to get uncomfortable is when we read this passage and remember the ones immediately before it. Paul was talking about the shameful things that the people do in darkness. And now, the light of Christ is going to shine on us? If that happens...everything is going to be visible. All my secrets will be brought to light. Don't shine the light. You're not going to like what you find. It's the same for you, isn't it? We all may be decent and respectable on the outside, but what is in there that can't be seen? You know *exactly* what I'm talking about. It's the stuff we did quietly and managed to cover up. That we're sure if anyone found out about, they'd never talk to us again. And by the light of the world, no one can see them. But by the light of God? That light's going to hit every stain on my soul and be sucked right in. Only the darkness on me will show. Everything will be made visible. Everything can be seen and everyone will see exactly what kind of person I am. I...I don't want those things known. And the worst part is that I may be able to hide them from the people around me, but I can't hide them from God...he knows. And frankly, he's the only one whose opinion really matters.

Is there anything to do but be terrified when that light shines? I'm sure you've thought it over with me here. You know exactly what it's going to show. Nothing is hidden in that divine light. Every selfish, judgmental, arrogant, stupid, petty thing we've ever done or said or thought is about to be made plain to God and everyone. No, there's absolutely nothing we can do. We've dug our own grave. We all did those things. We all deserve the repercussions that are about to come. And so we stand and maybe grit our teeth a little, waiting...

"Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

Just like it's easy to ignore what it would be like to have real light shining on us, it's easy to miss here exactly where the light is coming from. It is Christ's light. Christ's light doesn't act like normal light. It isn't absorbed at all in the darkness that we're covered in. When the light of Christ hits you, it reflects off of you. When the Father looks at you...he sees Christ's light. Not all the things done in darkness that stain our soul. They *don't* show. Instead, the Father sees light. That light of Christ was bought at a price. He suffered and died to earn it for you. But he gives it freely to you and to me and there is nothing that you or I have done to deserve it, all we can do is rejoice in it. You *were* once darkness. Now you *are* light. That is how God sees you.

And now the challenge goes out. **"Live as children of light and find out what pleases the Lord."**

This is the thrust of what Paul is trying to tell us here. You are a child of light! You are not bound to darkness any longer. You have been set free! Live as a child of light! Shine that light in the darkness of this world! Don't give in to your previous ways. But...how well do we do living up to the way God sees us? Take the time to ask yourself, right now...can anyone tell that you are a child of light? Do the decisions and actions of your life show that light? Do your choices about what you do with your time and the language you choose to use and even the way you dress shine a light into the world? Would a perfect stranger be able to tell that there's something different about you because of the way you live your life? Would a friend or coworker know that you're a Christian by how you act? *Do* they know? Or are you giving one more person a reason not to bother with church because "the whole place is full of hypocrites"? Do you live the light that God has attributed to you? Or are you walking the same path as those in darkness? Stay out of the dark. It is shameful to even mention what is done there. Don't tolerate it in your life. Let Christ's light shine so brightly in you than nothing else can be seen.

But how do we do this? It's one thing for me to just stand here and tell you to shine your light. But what is that? Paul gives a summary here, he says that it **"consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth"**, but let's be honest, that's a little vague. Ask 20 different people and you're likely to get 20 varying definitions of what's "right" or "true". Sure

some things will be the same...but the details are going to change quite a bit. Paul tells us to “**find out what pleases the Lord.**” True, we have a bit of the knowledge we need programmed in us, right? We call it our conscience. But...it’s not always right and it’s not always complete enough. No we need some kind of guide...some kind of manual.

We have that book. God gave it to us, from Genesis to Revelation, and within its pages it teaches us how to live as children of light. When it comes to teaching us what pleases the Lord it has really only one thing to say over and over: “love”. This love is unlike any kind of love we could come up with on our own. Because our love is conditional. We only love so long as there is something in it for us. But the love God has is completely different. God loves us strictly because he chooses too. God calls us to have that kind of love for him and for each other. Love not because you are given a reason, but love because it is what the light does. When we live this way we emulate our redeemer, Jesus. He didn’t care at all what happened to himself, as long as we were safe. He gave everything to take care of us, even though there was nothing about us to make him want to. We model this love when we do what is best for others regardless of what we have to give up for ourselves, whether it’s money or personal freedom or pride. But this love is so different from anything we normally understand as love, that we need constant correction on how to think about it. That is why the Bible is not like the manual to your DVD player or new TV, you can’t just skim it through once (if that) and wing it from there. The guide of God’s word needs daily and thorough study if we are to truly live like the people we are.

You see we need God’s regular guidance on this because, to shine that light, to be loving, it doesn’t always mean what we think it means. And it definitely doesn’t mean what the world thinks it should mean. But when we shine the light of God’s word, we see things that we couldn’t see otherwise, and we see things differently than the world sees them. Picture a child, hand raised in the air...about to come down on a searing hot stovetop. What is the loving thing to do if you saw this? Well, stop him of course. You mean it doesn’t matter to you that that’s what the child wants to do? That he may not understand and throw a fit because you wouldn’t let him have his way? You’d...you’d still stop him anyway? Of course you would. You know what he doesn’t know, that doing that would only hurt him.

You have knowledge in God’s word that the rest of the world does not know. They are dying. Every single one of them is infested with a disease that is slowly killing them and the most loving thing to do is to do whatever it takes to save lives. You need to shine the light into the lives of those dying people. You need to show them their sickness; that they are wrong and God will hold them accountable. But we don’t point out darkness in order to show how much brighter we are than them. And in fact, we don’t point it out in order to get them to change their actions. We show them their darkness to bring them to realize just how much they need the light of Christ. The change will come just like it has in us, but what they need now is the light. Now, the world will scream “you’re not being loving!” because we don’t let them have their way, but we know what they do not. We know that what they are doing is only hurting them, slowly killing them. Bring them to light.

Of course, it doesn’t just apply to the people who don’t know the light at all, does it? Many times those of us who are light fail to live as though we were light. And when we do that, we risk darkness again. The problem is we don’t always realize we’re doing it, or we don’t know the danger we’re in. It happens to us, and it happens to our friends. We need to be there for each other, shining that light back and forth so that we can continue to live as children of light. Don’t let a brother or sister persist in sin without speaking up because you don’t want to upset them or you’re afraid of making waves. You wouldn’t hesitate to stop a child from burning himself. When your brother or sister in the faith is hurting themselves, intervene. They may not understand at first why you think they shouldn’t be living together outside of marriage, or why their loose lips are such a problem or on and on. Shine the light of God’s word. It’s not your authority that speaks, it’s his. It’s showing them true love. And when a brother or sister speaks to you in love, *listen*. Recognize God’s authority in what they might be saying and give it an honest hearing; admit to yourself that it is actually possible you could be wrong.

Remember, the way to rise to this challenge, the way to live as light is found in regular repeated study of God’s word. As I said before, that’s the manual of how to show love, how to let our light shine. But the amazing thing about the Word is that it says something far more important. Every time we read it, the Holy Spirit reminds us of our own darkness within, and then lifts us out of that darkness into the light of Christ. God’s word is where we hear over and over again about his amazing love for us. That is the primary, central teaching of the Word. And it is through that message that the Holy Spirit strengthens us and encourages us so that we have the power through him to live as God sees us. To live as light.

For you were once in darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light, and find out what pleases the Lord. Amen.