

Prayer

Almighty God, You yearn for those who have turned away from You. Help us who are members of the 'Body of Christ' to be careful, lest our testimony and our deeds turn people away from You, and rob them of the liberating opportunities of faith and contributing to their estrangement and Your pain. Open our hearts and teach us to love those to whom we witness, so that they may come to know You as their Saviour. AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

In the course of the day, take time to pray for your church, its leaders, its work and its people

On-going prayers

- **Pray for the United Nations.** *Today, remember the peace keeping work of the United Nations. It is much criticised, and needs our prayers*
- *Pray about the forthcoming Copenhagen climate summit*
- *Give thanks to God for the food you purchase and eat*

Meditation

Let Christ inspire your attitude towards all:

Greet those you meet with an open heart;
Give time to all, from little children, to adults;
Listen carefully to what others may wish to say;
Allow time to the elderly to address their concerns;
Talk to young people because their opinion matters;
Enjoy conversation with people from every background;
Look beyond appearances before making presumptions;
Assume the best in people, and look for what is good.
Be known as one who cares, because of your love;
Respond with generosity to every appeal for help;

And in so doing, let Christ speak to others, through you.

Bible passage – Ephesians 5:6-14

⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient; ⁷ do not be associated with them, ⁸ for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good, right and true) ¹⁰ and discern what pleases the Lord. ¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead, expose them, ¹² for it is shameful even to mention the things done by them in secret. ¹³ Everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴ for light makes everything visible; this is why it says, 'Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you!'

Thought for the Day

Text – Ephesians 5:8

⁸ *Once, you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light'*

Thought

Ephesians 5:8 is one of those straightforward 'easy to remember' sentences from the Bible, and it also says a great deal about the life of faith we live. The Christian is one whose life has been turned around by Jesus, and now aspires to the highest of moral standards, here called 'light'.

Some find it difficult to be associated with high moral standards, because they fear the accusation 'hypocrite'. Surely, however, we need only be afraid if we have something to hide or we do not yet have complete faith in Christ. Let us not hold back our testimony of faith, but trust in the new life we have in Christ, and shine!

Bible Study

Review

The letter to the Ephesians has just revealed a list of wrongdoing that is incompatible with Christian faith. In yesterday's reading, we learnt about the evils of sexual immorality, impurity and greed, and also obscenity, foolish talk and vulgarity. One reason why we do not like reading about these is this. It can be difficult for us to stand back and say with honesty that our lives have not been blighted by one of these evils. We know it is not right to sin, but such lists touch on our vulnerabilities, and do not wish to be exposed.

It is highly likely that people felt the same in Paul's day, and he knew it. He therefore wrote to explain how to deal with these sins, but did so positively, using an illustration that went to the heart of the matter. In almost every verse after the first in this passage, he wrote about the shining of light (5:7-14), a picture that is both uplifting but also penetrating. Consequently, Paul's writing rises above the gloominess of its subject, which is 'how to deal with sin', to offer a series of inspiring texts about light overcoming darkness;

- *'at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord'* (verse 8)
- *'walk as children of the light ... and discern what pleases the Lord'* (verses 9,10)
- *'Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you'* (verse 14)

Although these texts are rousing, we must not isolate them or avoid the fact they are part of Paul's advice about dealing with sin. So in the first verse of our reading, Paul turns his attack on those who speak the smooth words say it is all right to sin; such words are *'empty'* and bring down the wrath of God on those who say them and act on them (5:6). Today, these words come from our permissive, through television, the internet and all forms of media, but in Paul's day, such false teaching and popular belief came from Greek philosophy.

People believed in those days that the world was split into two, represented by the earth and heaven, with the physical earth being as evil and worthless, and the heavens being 'spiritual' and good. Such beliefs commonly led people to the conclusion that it did not matter what you did with your body because it was 'bad', and one day, it would die. All that mattered was the cultivation of spiritual things that prepared the way to heaven. Consequently, sex did not matter, nor whether people mistreated one another. These were regarded as the fleeting things of this world that were nothing to do with eternity.

Even as I write, you will probably see how dangerously close this philosophy was to Christian faith, because it led some to say that since Christ had done away with sin on the Cross, sin was now irrelevant. There is good evidence to say that in the first century church, this was taught by some misguided preachers, which is why Paul said 'do not be associated with them' (5:7). His message is that in God's eyes, sin is always important, not just because it breaks down human society and family relationships, but because it separates people from God.

To drive his message home, Paul paints a true picture of good and evil, which is not a contrast between physical and spiritual, earth and heaven or this life and the next (according to Greek philosophy). He uses the picture of light and darkness to represent good and evil as experienced in this world, and he encouraged his readers to find their light in Christ, and leave darkness behind (5:7). He then appeals to God's people to *'walk in the light'*, adding a phrase that links this idea to that of the 'fruit' of the life of Christ in the believer, which is *'good, right and true'* (5:9). Moreover, light exposes anything in the darkness (5:11), and there is no hiding of our sins before God. He finishes with the rousing appeal 'Sleeper awake!' All the Christian has to do in order to defeat sin is to respond to Christ's call.

Going Deeper

The Bible study goes deeper to look at these issues:

- What does darkness and light represent in this text? (5:6-10)
- How does the Christian 'walk in the light'? (5:9-12)
- How do we 'expose' darkness? (5:11-14)

Notes on the text and translation

Important words

V6 'wrath'

The Greek 'orge', often translated 'wrath', or 'anger', does not refer to an emotion. It means anger that results in action, and hence it can mean retribution, punishment or revenge; without pursuing the matter here, the 'wrath of God' is an important feature of the Bible and needs to be understood, not explained away.

Significant phrases

V6 'those who are disobedient'

Other translations:

'comes upon the sons of disobedience' (NIV)

'coming upon the disobedient' (New American)

The Greek says 'sons (children) of disobedience'. However, most modern translators prefer to change the poetic tone of the phrase to speak of 'those who are disobedient'. This is because in reality, Paul was not talking about people who were the children of those who had been disobedient, but people who were disobedient themselves. The phrase 'sons of disobedience' is an idiom of speech carried over from Hebrew into Greek.

V10 'and discern what pleases the Lord'

Other translations:

'find out what pleases the Lord' (NIV)

'Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord' (NRSV)

The Greek word at the beginning of this sentence means 'test, examine, find out, discern, discover', according to context. It seems to me that we cannot test or examine God's will, rather we are enabled by the Holy Spirit to discern His will

Problems with the ancient Greek/Hebrew text

V9 'for the fruit of light is found in all that is good, right and true'

Other translations:

'for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth' (NIV)

'for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth' (NKJV)

The issue at stake here is this, the King James version has 'the fruit of the Spirit ...', and not 'fruit of the light ...', as in my translation and in all other modern versions. By far the majority of ancient manuscripts available have 'truth of the light ...' and only one important papyrus contains the words 'fruit of the Spirit ...'. This presents scholars with a problem; which is original? I tend to agree with most modern scholars who think that the one ancient version with 'fruit of the Spirit ...' was written by accident because the copyist was familiar with the famous 'fruit of the Spirit' in Galatians, and this influenced the later Latin versions upon which the King James version was based. 'Fruit of the light ...' fits with what Paul says here in his letter.

Going Deeper

What does darkness and light represent in this text? (5:6-10)

As we have already seen, darkness and light represent evil and good. However, the difference between these two is not always easy to see. In Paul's day, as in ours, people were unsure about what was evil and what was good, and what was sin and what was not; the world, as is often said, is neither black and white but many shades of grey!

Ephesians has already supplied us with some answers to this, and the point has already been made that Christ is a perfect example of what is good and right and pleasing to God; indeed, we are to 'live a life of love, just as Christ loved us' (5:2). In the days of the early church, the evidence of Jesus' life, of His teaching and His death and resurrection, was maintained by passing on the teaching of the disciples, who first received it from Jesus. Eventually, agreement was reached saying that their testimony was contained within the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. So now, Christians can access God's Word firstly as the

'Law and the Prophets' in the Old Testament, which tells us about the moral nature of God's world and the people He chose whose task was to live it. We can also access the authoritative accounts of the life of Christ, in all its profound simplicity and depth, which tells us about the love of God and His redeeming power. These two reveal the 'Light' of God, or as Paul has already described it in the letter to the Ephesians; this is God's '*mystery*' that has now been '*made known*' in Christ (3:3f.).

Our passage also indicates one other way in which we come to know the difference between darkness and light (in a moral sense). Every Christian is characterised by baptism in Christ, which is described here as a transfer from darkness to light (5:8). The connection between this passage and baptism is so strong that some scholars suggest that it was once used as part of a baptism service! So when Paul says '*walk as children of the light*' (5:8), this is a call to his readers to reflect in their living the fundamental difference between life before and after the presence of Christ. No one can perceive all truth and moral light at the moment of conversion or baptism, but the nature of the transition should be a guide to our perception of what is right and wrong in God's eyes; and we must '*discern what pleases the Lord*' (5:10).

How does the Christian '*walk in the light*'? (5:9-12)

Despite Paul's insistence that God's people are '*light in the Lord*' (5:8) through faith and by baptism, he knew that there would always be more for each Christian to learn, and this is reflected in what he wrote next. To '*walk as children of light*' means to go forward through life, gradually acquiring this knowledge whilst on the journey of life, moreover, walking '*as children of light*' is a journey taken with Christ. Christ is the light, and the journey has a specific goal, towards God and towards eternal life. Some who read what Paul has to say about light and darkness do not give him sufficient credit for his practical acceptance that people journey towards the fullness of Christian experience, and they mature as they walk in the light of Christ.

Verses 9 and 10 help us understand how we may take this journey. In an addition to the idea of walking as children of the light; verse 9 says, '*for the fruit of light is found in all that is good, right and true*'. Fruit, of course, is a well worn metaphor in Paul's writings, but this is the only place where the term '*the fruit of light*' is used. The phrase makes most sense if we have spotted that Paul has by now equated the light with Christ. This means that if we walk with Christ as our light, then we will produce the evidence (the fruit) of this closeness with Christ in the form of '*all that is good, right and true*' (5:9). These three are all characteristics of Christ, of course, and we may show these qualities partly, but Jesus lived them fully. He was all goodness, He was in a perfect and '*right*' relationship with God (this is the proper understanding of what '*right*' means in this sentence), and he taught and lived the truth of God His Father. Alternatively, we might say that people should see something of these great qualities in us, and they should point to Christ. We must expect that as we walk with our Lord, we will show these '*fruits*'.

The next point is often forgotten, and is often misunderstood, and it is the requirement placed upon us not to engage with evil but to walk away from it. Paul puts it like this; the one who walks in the light must '*take no part*' in the works of darkness, and not even '*mention the things done by them in secret*' (5:12). The journey of a Christian is not just towards a goal but away from what is left behind, which is to be forgotten. From this, it is clear that Paul recognises the power of darkness and evil, and if the Christian thinks it right to engage with evil then it would be wise to make sure that this is His will; Paul's advice is to expose evil by absenting from it, and not risking its power to tempt by engaging with it. The difference between light and dark will be exposed to the world when people of faith have no part in what is dark.

How do we '*expose*' darkness? (5:11-14)

We have already begun to answer this question, but in the last two verses of this text, Paul says more. He starts by stating the obvious, that the light exposes everything (5:13), but the more we think about what he said, the more intriguing it is. If we have thought that light and darkness are two '*opposites*' in competition with each other, then we must now re-think. Darkness, although real, does not have the power to do anything to light, except perhaps to dim it. Light, however, has the ability to completely expose darkness, and bring it into the light! In this simple phrase, Paul gives us a compelling understanding of the victory of God over evil and the ultimate glory of the defeat of Satan (as in Revelation 20:10f.).

Then, we read the stunningly poetic words; '*Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you!*' (5:14). It is possible that this could be a free and liberal translation of the great prophecy of Isaiah; '*Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.*' (Isaiah 60:1). The simplest explanation of this highly poetic phrase is that it was well known, either as a hymn or some other form of words used in the life of the church. Some have suggested that it could have been said immediately after baptism, to welcome the new believer into the new life in Christ, and without further knowledge of the early church, this is as good a theory as we can get. The setting certainly fits. As the new believer rose from the baptismal pool (or river, or whatever was used for baptism), these words are a heavenly proclamation of victory. The salvation of one soul is a spiritual statement in this world of the difference between light and darkness, and darkness has been exposed. The sleeper (a non-believer) has awoken, death has been defeated and the light of Christ has shone for all to see!

Application

This passage says a surprising amount about the walk of faith, and there are many texts that speak of the difference between darkness and light (e.g. Romans 13:12, 1 Corinthians 4:5, 1 Thessalonians 5:5 etc.). However the use of the imagery of light in this passage gives us an understanding of life's journey as well as the initial Christian conversion experience, and also the advice to walk away from the things of darkness and have no more to do with them.

Some within the church have great difficulty with the idea of Christian conversion, because they have been brought up in the faith and have always know Jesus as their Saviour. The number of people for whom this is now true is less and less in a country such as Great Britain. However, in the classic sacraments of churches such as the Church of England and the Methodist Church, people are required to make a personal confession of faith before 'confirmation' of their baptismal vows. This is no less demanding and exacting as a confession of faith as those made by people who come forward for adult baptism by full immersion (irrespective of your stance over baptismal practice). If God's people have been properly taught, no one need fail to know that their baptism / confirmation is light to the world's darkness, and the walk of faith is a positive engagement with what is good, right and true. The disciple is called to walk in this world with Christ, and consequently, shine His light in the world.

Secondly, you will find many Christians today who suggest that in order to defeat evil, then you need to know it, and engage with it. The idea is to become like police under-cover agents, who are embedded in drug gangs in order to gain the information required to prosecute them. It is better to take our model for how to defeat evil and evangelise from God's Word rather than the world, however, and the advice of this passage is to walk away from darkness so that God will expose it for what it is. In the past, Christians gave up drink because of the terrible cost of alcoholism; in the light of the drinking problems in our world today, we might learn from this.

Even in our troubled world, people will still come up to one who is a Christian and expect him or her to have higher moral standards, and it can be difficult to live up to these expectations. However, this is our basic witness to the world, and we should not stand back from our obligations. If we are known as Christians because of our love (1 John 3:10f.), then we are indeed shining a light into the world.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. In your group, discuss what you have gained by studying this passage of Scripture. What does 'darkness' and 'light' mean?
2. How can we go about exposing the 'unfruitful works of darkness' mentioned by Paul in verse 11?
3. Why do some people manage to live apparently happy and successful lives whilst totally ignoring God. How would you present the claims of Christ to them?

Topics covered by this text

- *The light of Christ and the darkness of evil*
- *The 'fruit of light'; goodness, righteousness and truth*
- *Exposing darkness by walking away from it*

Personal comments by author

I know what it is like to walk away from something for the sake of the Gospel. When I first became aware of my faith, I was playing rock music with a band at my school. One day, after a particularly successful session, I became overwhelmed with the sense that I could not continue to be involved with the band; for me, it was an evil that I needed to leave behind. I did not say this in so many words to my friends, but to their dismay, I left the band, and their sound was thin without a 'rhythm' guitarist! I now know that Satan can use all forms of music, and he was using rock music to take my life in the wrong direction. I am profoundly glad that I let it go, even though people have sometimes said to me 'what if ...?'

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Take the phrase 'walk as children of light ... and discern what pleases the Lord' and memorise it, quoting it book, chapter and verse. When you say it to yourself, apply it to the circumstances of your life at the time.*
 - *Discuss in your family or with the people with whom you live, how you can banish some of the ungodly or worldly attitudes, words and habits people develop which compromise the evidence of true faith in your home.*
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Final Prayer

Almighty God; I give You my all in the journey of my life, so take the little I have to offer and use me. Change me into the person You would have me be, make me ever vigilant of sin, and give me hope as I catch sight of Your glory. Thank You, Almighty God. AMEN
