



Night hikes in at Glorieta, New Mexico were exciting and thrilling. Our destination was a rock plateau. From this spot we could see what seemed like millions of stars. Being there with my friends, singing worship songs to God reminded us of verses like these: *“He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name”* (Psalm 147:4); *“Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky”* (Phil. 2:15).

Getting down from the top we’d go straight down the mountain, leaving the trail for those less adventurous. It was always unpredictable because it was impossible to walk the same path in the dark with no trail to show the way. On one night when we reached the bottom there was a 300-pound black bear waiting for us on the road. Running around in the dark didn’t seem fun anymore!

Our passage today deals with the dangers that lurk in the dark and the splendor of shining light. Follow along as I read the first part of Ephesians 5:5-7 and 11a.

For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them.

Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.

Six Descriptions of the Dark.

Immorality, impurity and greed

The portrait that’s being painted here is a life that is characterized by lying, anger rages, stealing, unwholesome talking, bitterness, rage, fighting, slander and sexual immorality. These are all descriptions from last week’s sermon. We were instructed to get rid of these and instead behave like Jesus. In our passage today, the Apostle Paul is summarizing all of that when he says,

For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God (v. 5).

It’s important to acknowledge that the Apostle Paul is not talking about behavior, as if it operates in a vacuum. From the very beginning of Ephesians it’s been crystal clear that behavior flows from our identity. And since Jesus has given us a new identity, the

appropriate result is that our behavior show that. So of course a person whose life is summarized by immorality, impurity and greed has no place in God’s kingdom.

Idolatry

“The human heart is an idol factory that takes good things like a successful career, love, material possessions, even family, and turns them into ultimate things. Our hearts deify them as the center of our lives, because, we think, they can give us significance and security, safety and fulfillment, if we attain them.” (Timothy J. Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*)

Separated from God for eternity

For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God (v. 5).

Empty words

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient (v. 6).

Fruitless deeds

Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, (v. 11a).

Author John Maxwell wrote: “When you’re gone people will mostly summarize your life with one sentence. I want to influence what that sentence says.”

God’s wrath

...for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient (v. 6).

This is the last description of the dark in these verses. It describes the culmination of all the problems with the darkness: God’s wrath. This is a weighty and somber subject and an important truth to acknowledge.

God’s wrath will exhibit itself by administering eternal judgment in hell for everyone who lives a life of darkness. Living in darkness is living in rebellion to God.

Humanity universally searches for escape from these dangers that lurk in the dark. People I’ve talked with that are living in darkness don’t want to be there.

I remember talking to Mike in Newquay, England. Mike was moving in a pack with his fellow football friends, prowling for

women and hitting the bars. I was standing on the front steps of a church trying to engage people in conversations about Jesus.

As he and I talked a few things were obvious: He knew he was an immoral and impure man; he was dissatisfied with the spiritual explanations he'd been given from supposed spiritual leaders; although his life was filled with partying and self-indulgence, he felt bored and empty.

So I told him about Jesus in ways he'd never heard before. I listened to his confusion and helped him think through his broken logic. After about an hour he was ready to move on and rejoin his friends. We concluded our time together by me putting a hand on his shoulder and praying for him. And then he left.

The majority of people want to escape a life characterized by darkness. But what they possess in desire, they lack in direction. They're confused about how to escape and scared to death to relinquish control of their life to Jesus Christ. So often they choose to remain in the darkness, stumbling around trying to find their way.

We are uniquely qualified to help people get out of darkness because we used to live there. We are uniquely qualified to shine our light in their darkness because Jesus Christ has lit us.

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. This is why it is said: “Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you” (Eph. 5:8–14).

Four Descriptions of the Light.

When God lights a life, you radiate light forever

Step 1 is Jesus Christ, who is the ultimate pure light, shines on us; illuminating our lives. The light is Jesus. When we shine, we glorify him.

“Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you” (v. 14).

Step 2 is us shining.

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.... everything that is illuminated becomes a light (v. 8, v. 13).

Contrast a lighter and a lantern. Some people might think of their life like a lighter: possessing the ability to turn on and off. That is not biblical. A more biblical illustration is a lantern that contains an eternal fuel source. The light never goes out... ever. We have been lit.

Consider these Bible verses that also make this point: *“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 God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ”* (2 Cor. 4:6).

God shines first. Then we possess his light. And of course, light shines. *“Jesus said, ‘You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden’”* (Matt. 5:14). While we used to be darkness, now we are light. Our nature has fundamentally been changed. I love this because it sets the expectation of how I'm to act.

You were dead in transgressions and sins,... gratifying the cravings of our flesh, by our nature objects deserving of God’s wrath (verses 2–3).

But because of his great love, God made us alive in order that we might show the incomparable riches of his grace—that's shining our light.

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (2 Peter 2:9). Some Christians might feel more like a lighter than a lantern because they struggle with sin so much. I understand that and we're going to address that in a moment. But it's vital for us to establish the Biblical truth: If you are a Christian, you are lit.

Light can shine brighter

We have the ability to bear more or less fruit—the light (goodness, righteousness and truth).

...and find out what pleases the Lord (v. 10).

...(for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) (v. 9).

With our dark behavior and words, we can diminish the light we shine. It's like we turn down the intensity knob on our lantern and our light is dimmer. Then we cover our lantern with mud, making our light even harder to see.

Behaviors like selfishness, idolatry, lying, anger rages, stealing, unwholesome talking, bitterness, rage, fighting, slander and sexual immorality diminish our light. Some of these descriptions are from last week's sermon, summarized by immorality, impurity and greed. But please don't misunderstand that your day-to-day actions determine your eternal salvation, meaning that these kinds of actions turn your light off. No. Your eternal salvation is determined when a person completely surrenders their life to Jesus Christ. At that moment, eternity is sealed and a life has been lit. And when our behavior exhibits goodness or righteousness or truth, we shine brighter and brighter.

Here are five ways we can shine our light brighter:

» Confessing to the Lord, maybe confessing to people who've seen it.

» Progressively expose ourselves to God's Word: reading, Bible Study, worship music, memorizing, plaques.

» Align our actions with the Light: show kindness when it's undeserved, be truthful even when it's to your advantage to lie a bit, go out of your way to help someone out, listen with genuine interest when someone is talking to you ... a few examples of goodness, righteousness and truth.

» Align our words with the Light: speak up when you get a natural chance to talk about your faith.

» Get a partner to encourage you and hold you accountable.

It's like Neo in the first *Matrix* movie. When he entered the Matrix for the first time he was fully able and capable to do new things. However, his mind was holding him back. They told him he had to free his mind. In essence, get rid of his old patterns of thinking: If you think that way, you'll behave that way. You've got to think in new ways.

Think of how similar that is to the life of a Christian. We stop thinking like our old, dead, dark selves and accept and embrace "I can shine brighter." With Jesus living inside of us, we can say no to the sinful patterns of our past.

With Jesus' resurrection power inside of us, we possess the power to say no to any temptation because Jesus can defeat any temptation. But the part of us that the Apostle Paul calls the flesh resists this change. We can feel dominated by sin, distracted by other priorities in life and perhaps even feel unworthy of the love that Jesus has given us. If we're honest, we've all felt this way. And when we're in this spot, shining our light doesn't seem right. What light?, we might ask.

God knows this about us. He knows our weaknesses. So God inspired the Apostle Paul to make it very clear: We are lit because God lit us. Receiving this truth, meditating on this truth, and taking steps to intentionally shine brighter is God's intention for us.

Light is not designed to keep close company with darkness

Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them (v. 11).

Therefore do not be partners with them (v. 7).

It's pretty obvious why light is not designed to keep close company with darkness, right? Because when a light is shining, it can't help but light something up and then it's not dark anymore. The two cannot coexist, unless there's a barrier between them, or unless the light turns itself really low.

I think this means, if you are friends with a non-Christian, it's totally normal for you to have differences, on a heart level, that are significant!

I had this experience with a friend named Dennis. I liked him. We coached our sons together in baseball. We saw eye to eye on

encouraging the boys instead of yelling at them. We both enjoyed running for exercise. He had a black lab, I had a Labradoodle. He kept his yard nicely groomed and so did I. We both cared for our city and participated in civic and charitable events.

But there was a gap between us because Dennis' life was dark. He did not understand nor have any interest in my light. And the light parts of my life are the closest to my heart. So on a heart level, Dennis and I were never going to be close.

I need someone else whose life has been lit by Jesus Christ to understand my heart. This is why we can spend one night with a Christian and feel connected to them. The conversation topic that Cassie and I enjoy the most over dinner with new friends is, "Tell us how you became a Christian." As we all share our stories, there is a connection, a close connection, a bond because just as light is not supposed to be in close company with darkness, light is supposed to be in company with light.

**Light exposes fruitless deeds and disobedient behavior
Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, (verses 11–13).**

Note that the image here is **not** a person shining their light, like a high-powered flashlight. "What are you doing way over there? I'm going to shine my light on you." No.

Instead we expose the dark by the essence of our character or actions and our words. It radiates out of us. Jesus radiates out of us. Think of how people living in darkness reacted to Jesus. Get the image accurately in your mind: Jesus is the brightest light in the universe and he walked around the countryside of Judea associating with lots of people who were characterized by darkness. How did these people react? They were attracted to Jesus. And when he does, the darkness of others is revealed. I find plenty of opportunities to do this without looking for opportunities to find the darkness.

Back in Hermosa Beach, Cassie and I had a lot of non-Christian friends in the city, lots of families we shared life with on the sporting fields and school events and lazy Sunday afternoons on the beach. We genuinely liked them. All of them knew I was a pastor and we'd had conversations with most of them about spiritual things at one time or another. For this we were grateful and we prayed regularly that God would use us to shine in their lives.

I remember one night when we found out that one of the families was throwing a party and this time we weren't invited. We knew everyone there. We'd been invited to other parties. But this time, we were excluded. It never feels good to be excluded and Cassie and I talked about it and wondered why.

The week following, as I ran into people, it became obvious why we'd been left out. Our presence at the party would have exposed their dark and shameful deeds, and they didn't want to deal with that. On that night, they preferred living in the dark. We should expect that kind of exclusion at times because when our lives expose shameful, dark deeds, the choice is to either stop doing them or get rid of the light.

What's the Point of Shining?

Sure, it's the natural thing for us to do, a child of God. But what's the point of it?

- » To show Jesus to others
- » It's the most satisfying and fulfilling way to live

I've got some questions for you:

Are there some behaviors in your life that are more associated with the darkness than the light? If so, don't you want to confess them?

Are you compromising in some areas and accepting darkness instead of illuminating it?

Are you willing to shine your light, as brightly as possible, today? If so, tell that to Jesus. Prepare yourself to shine for him today.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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