

## Light and Dark Living Eph.5:8-14

**Intro.** In my early college years, I was employed as a night watchman. Tucked away in the Catskill Mountains of New York State, between midnight and 5 AM, the campus of the Kings College seemed like the darkest place in the universe. My assignment was to tour the entire campus turning a key at about 30 locations each hour. My most frightening experience happened at the bottom of the hill at sometime around 3 AM. As I approached the building, the porch light went out and I was alone in pitch darkness. Now both the switch for that porch light and the key I was to turn, were inside the building. I backed away. The fact that the light went out, surely meant someone was inside...some- one waiting to slit my throat and...we'll I never actually worked out the rest of that scenario...steal a tuba or sheet music or something. (No one is ever completely rational at 3 AM!) But my heart was thumping like a washing machine with a 5 x 7 throw rug slung against one side of the tub. I mustered every ounce of courage I could find and cautiously approached the building. When I stepped on the porch, the light came on again. What could this mean?.....it meant the bulb was loose. A quick twist of the wrist and the drama ended. I'm sure each of us a darkness story.

**Eph.5:8-14** is built on one of the most common yet arresting metaphors in the NT. **Light** and **darkness** are symbols used throughout the NT to describe the dramatic difference between life in Christ and life without Him. In this practical section of Paul's letter, the contrast between the old life and the new life in Christ is to be just that dramatic! As **chap. 5** opens, believers are instructed to put off the old ways and imitate God by **living a life of love**. Now in **v.8**, we're instructed to put off the unfruitful ways of darkness and imitate God by living **as children of light**.

Maybe you never thought about it this way before, but light wouldn't exist apart from God. **Gen.1:3** says, **And God said, Let there be light and there was light**. On the first day of creation, God spoke light into existence. Before plants, animals, or man, God provided light. And listen...there was light before God created the sun, moon and stars. If you have a problem with the physics of that, you'll also struggle with the Bible's description of Heaven. **Rev.22:5** says, **There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun...** In the new order, night and darkness will be things of the past yet lamps and sunlight won't be needed either. How can this be? The answer is in the rest of the verse...**for the Lord God will give them light**. In the end when God makes all things new, light will be derived from God just as it was at the beginning.

But let's take a moment to remember how essential light is. Without light, nothing would be visible and colors wouldn't exist. Vegetation would wither and die and no living organism could survive. Because living things depend on light, God provided light before plants, animals, and man were created. It would seem that God thought of everything! But when was the last time you thanked God for His faithfulness in sending a sunrise? We take so many wonderful blessings for granted!

Since ancient times, men have been mystified by the power of light which science now calls *electro-magnetic radiation*. Having rejecting the Creator, the heathen worshipped the Sun as the source and sustainer of life. As a hangover from ancient Sun worship, the first day of the week is still called *Sunday*. But unlike the heathen, we know that God is the source and the giver of life...not the Sun.

Throughout the Scriptures, God's holy character is compared to light. **I Jn.1:5** says, **God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all.** Notice this verse doesn't say *light is God*...it says **God is light** just as the Bible says, **God is love.** - **I Jn. 4:8; 16** James refers to God as **the Father of lights** - **Jas.1:17** The Psalmist wrote that God **wraps Himself in light as with a garment.** - **Ps.104:2** A similar verse in **I Tim. 6:16** says that God...**lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see.** In these verses **light** is used symbolically to express the **glory, holiness, truth, and purity** of God.

And like the way light diffuses and spreads, God wants to reveal Himself. **Ps.43:3** - **Send forth your light and your truth let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell.** Like rays of sunlight that stream from heaven to earth, **Ps.19** says **the heavens declare the glory of God.** Even so God has made known the mystery of His being and His will. In the same way, Peter compared Scripture to light shining in a dark place. **II Pet.1:19** - **And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.**

Yet in total contrast, the Bible uses **night** and **darkness** as a metaphor for all that is opposite to the glory, holiness, truth, and purity of God. **Gen. 1:4** says, **God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness.** It's significant that God never said darkness was good. In fact, the light emanating from God overcame the darkness that engulfed the pre-creation earth. - **Gen.1:2, 3** In this we observe an important property of light...it **overcomes darkness.** A small halogen penlight or even the light of a candle can overpower the darkness of closet or a crawlspace or music building. I wished I had one that night. Make a note of it...light has **overcoming power.**

The Bible compares the cosmos that is separate and estranged from Him to a **world of darkness.** Like a planet too distant to receive the benefit of the Sun's light, **Isa. 59:9,10** describes a society that has moved away from God. **So justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us. We look for light, but all is darkness; for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows. Like the blind we grope along the wall, feeling our way like men without eyes. At midday we stumble as if it were twilight; among the strong, we are like the dead.** Chaos results when God's light is suppressed or extinguished altogether. A sad illustration is the plight of public education in America. Our legislators have plunged us in darkness by shutting God out of our classrooms. Now they grope and stumble and feel their way around seeking solutions for apathy / crime / violence / substance abuse / teenage pregnancies / and suicide.

Lives are wasted and destroyed as Satan smiles. But solutions elude us because we are so far removed from the light of God's truth.

And just as there is no color or beauty without light, the joy of life fades apart from God's truth. Light brings vitality and loveliness. Yet the Bible associates darkness with ignorance, fear, insecurity, futility, sadness and death. With all of these meanings in mind, the first arrival of Jesus had vivid significance. **Matt. 4:16 - The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.** What would it be like to live in total darkness? Can you imagine that?

**illus.** When making service calls for General Roofing Co., I had an unusual experience. My knock at the door was answered by a distant voice inviting me to come in. I opened the door and ascended a flight of stairs in complete darkness. At the landing, I had a strange experience. I felt the hairy head of a small child beneath my hand. I hadn't been told that the entire family was blind. Now think about it...if you're blind, why turn on the lights and waste the electricity? The trouble was...I was there to locate and fix a roof leak and needed at least a flashlight.

Imagine living your whole life in total darkness. That was the world's condition before Jesus came. And that continues to be the situation and destiny of all who reject Him...darkness. Maybe you've heard someone say, *"I'm going to Hell because that's where my friends are."* That creed has several major problems. First, from the example of the rich man of **Lk.16**, Hell is so terrible, any friends you have there are praying you won't join them! Second, Hell is a place of **...darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.** If your friends are there, you won't see them and they won't see you. But in total contrast, the arrival of Jesus was like a glorious sunrise and His return will be like the dawn of a new day.

**1. The fruitful and pleasing deeds of light - vs. 8-10 - 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.**

Notice the contrast in **v.8...you were once darkness but now you are light in the Lord.** Just as light and darkness are polar opposites, Paul's purpose in these verses is to emphasize the dramatic difference between what we once were and now are. God has turned our darkness to light!

For a moment, let's turn to **Jn. 1:6-9. There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.** Jesus is **the true light** because He is the Creator and the source of light. **v.9** says, He **gives light to every man.** This means that light emanates from Christ to every human being.

Many have questioned whether *the Heathen are really lost?* The Bible explains that every human being has received a measure of light from God and we are personally accountable for the light we received. Hudson Taylor, the missionary founder of China Inland Mission once said, *"I have never met a Chinaman who has lived up to the light he was given."* What Taylor observed is universally true. There isn't one of us has lived up to the light we've received. By our own resistance, we're all low-information receivers. This is why **Rom. 1:20** concludes, **that men are without excuse.**

In **Jn.3:19, 20**, Jesus explains how human nature typically responds to God's light. **This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.** The human race is nocturnal, we prefer darkness. We prefer ignorance and immorality to truth and morality because sin is more to our liking.

Before we leave **Jn. 3**, notice **v.21 - Whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been through God.** Those who live by the truth come to the light. We don't remain in the dark where filth seems clean and OK. By the way, my wife prefers a hotel room with bright light. She wants to see any critters that might be sharing the room with her. In the same way, God's people don't live in pretense or evaluate behavior by darkened standards. We allow God's truth to shine on us to expose life's issues as they really are. Here is the connection between **Jn. 3** and our study in **Eph.5. Eph. 5:1-7** calls believers to live lives of moral purity. **v.3** says, **among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed...** **v.4** continues, **Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking.** These sins belong to the night and the darkness. And just as none of these sins are found in God, none should be found in His children because we've been made children of light.

As we seek to imitate God, we must live in purity. While a good reputation is based on what man can see...the Lord sees everything we do whether in darkness or daylight. The Psalmist said, **even the darkness will not be dark to you...for darkness is as light to you.** We might say God has perfect night-vision! Nothing we do escapes His notice. Until our sins are forgiven and cleansed by the blood of Christ, nothing is more frightening than that!

**Col. 1:13** explains that sinners who trust Christ for salvation are rescued from one realm to another. **For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves.** This fact underlies **v.8. You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.** It's important to recognize **v.8** doesn't say God's light is shining on you...it doesn't say your eyes are now opened to see God's light...it says, **now you are light in the Lord.** Because God's light has invaded our innermost being, we are light. Light's diffusing property causes God's presence to shine from the inside out. In **Jn.8:12** Jesus said, **I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will**

**have the light of life.** What does it mean to be a Christian? It means to possess **the light of life.** We are recipients of God's glory, holiness, truth, and purity. In contrast with the darkened understanding of our past, **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 the glory of God in the face of Christ. - II Cor.4:6**

Jesus said, **You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. Matt.5:14,15** In these verses Jesus explained that light can be obscured like a lamp placed under a bowl. In the same way, Christ's light in us can be over-shadowed by sin / selfishness / and anything that doesn't conform to God's ways. And few sins obscure our light more effectively than those listed in **vs. 3-4!** For this reason, there must not even be a hint of immorality in us. And **4:31** commands us to **Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.**

But the basis for the command to **live as children of light** is the fact that **now we are light in the Lord.** If anyone should bring light into this dark world, it's God's people! As the old Gospel song says, we should "*brighten the corner where we are.*" So these verses call us to conduct ourselves in ways that are appropriate for those who have God's light in them. We're called to live lives that are a visible witness to the glory / holiness / truth, and purity of God.

A story is told of a guy who found it hard to practice his faith in the plant where he worked. He told his pastor how he wished and prayed for other employment. His pastor responded by asking him a question. He said, "*where do you hang a light?...in a bright place?*" The man said, "*No sir, in a dark place...in a place that has no light.*" I hate it when this happens, but he man immediately got the point. God put him in that workplace to be a light. It was there God wanted his light to shine.

It's an awesome privilege and responsibility to be a light-bearer for God! Jesus said, **Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in Heaven. - Matt. 5:16** Yet a shining light can have another affect. Light exposes and reveals. That's why the ungodly sometimes clean up their act when a Christian comes around. Yet that's why the presence of a Christian on a job or in a classroom, sometimes evokes a negative response. As Jesus said, **people love darkness instead of light because their deeds are evil.** When we represent God's light, our lifestyle and views tend to irritate the unsaved. But shine on brothers and sisters! When we encounter disapproval, we must not cover our light. But take heart and don't be discouraged because light has the power to overcome darkness. Darkness is the absence of *electro-magnetic radiation*. You have power your unsaved friend doesn't have. And if they will listen and respond to the light of Christ, the darkness in their lives can be dispelled. Be faithful to them and they too may become light in the Lord. That's our mission. Like nocturnal creatures, light will chase some off. But like flying insects to a porch light, the light in our lives will attract others.

In **v.9** Paul gets more specific. He speaks of **the fruit of the light**. This phrase refers to the visible manifestations of God's light in our lives. He lists 3 manifestations. He says God's light will show up in our lives as **goodness, righteousness, and truth**.

- **All goodness** is the counterpart to **every form of malice** in **4:31**. **All goodness** is a life of **good will** and **good works**. It's love in action. The light of **goodness** will make our lives attractive to others. It shows up in those who are helpful and encouraging. And goodness is gentle and kind. It's not rude like an oncoming set of high beams that runs you off the road.
- **Righteousness** is rightness of character before God and men. Righteousness is doing what God would do in a given situation. In **I Tim. 6:11** believers are commanded to flee from harmful desires and **pursue righteousness**.
- Finally, the fruit of the light will show up as **truth**. Truth is opposite to the lying, deceit, vanity, and error which is so common in our world. Truth is being genuine and honest...its old fashioned integrity and reliability. It's saying what we mean and meaning what we say.

So **goodness, righteousness, and truth** are 3 ways **the fruit of the light** within us will show up in us. Like a dimmer switch that works both ways, the presence or absence of these qualities determine the intensity of the light others see. As a bottom line to the contrasts between light and darkness, **v.10** says, **and find out what pleases the Lord**. Behavior that pleases the Lord, is always good, righteous, and true. So in the routines of life we need to discipline ourselves to ask the question...*"Does this please the Lord? Is this something God would approve of and be glorified by?"*

**2. The fruitless and shameful deeds of darkness - vs. 11, 12 - Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret.** In **vs.11,12** children of light are charged with three responsibilities with respect to **the fruitless deeds of darkness**.

- In the first place, we're to have *no involvement* with them. **Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness...** God separated light from darkness at the time of creation because they darkness and light have nothing in common...they're polar opposites. The emphasis in **v.11** prohibits involvement in the activities of darkness, not with unsaved people who involve themselves in those activities. **I Cor. 5:9-11** instruct us to separate ourselves from disobedient fellow believers, but not from every unsaved person. Paul explains that Christians would have to leave the world to have no contact with sinners. If we isolated ourselves, how would anyone be reached for Christ? But recognize with me that **v.11** is a command, not a suggestion...**Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness**.
- The second command is *no neutrality*. Notice the words...**but rather expose them**. To remain silent or neutral in the face of evil is to condone it. Light exposes and reveals things as they truly are. A righteous life-style can serve like

a conscience. It rebukes wrong-doers and may cause them to squirm with discomfort. But in moral and spiritual issues, Christ calls us to avoid neutrality and let our light shine. This doesn't mean we should make ourselves obnoxious. But the stands we take should be clear and firm. Beyond righteous living, there may also be times when God asks us to speak the truth. It's hard to tell a friend what he's doing is wrong. It hurts to have friends turn against us or accuse us of judging them. On numerous occasions I've had to tell unmarried couples that God regards living together before marriage as sin. They see nothing wrong with what they're doing and most aren't interested in what God has to say. So don't expect light to make you the most popular person in the plant, neighborhood, or classroom. But true children of light won't be neutral about sin issues. They will obey God by exposing **the fruitless deeds of darkness**.

John the Baptist was beheaded for pointing out Herod's incestuous marriage to the wife of his brother, but he was faithful to God. Jesus said, **John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light.** - Jn. 5:33 When Herod first heard him, John's message was provocative and perhaps even entertaining. But when the light of John's life and message began to expose sin so close to home, Herod snuffed out the lamp. To Timothy Paul wrote, **all who will live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.** The light of a godly life never sits well with those who prefer darkness.

So we're instructed to have *no involvement* and *no neutrality* when it comes to darkness. How is it with you? Have you obeyed these commands?

- **v.12** then calls for *no mention... it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret*. No mention, means no conversation about it. Loose talk or allowing ourselves to be entertained by sinful activity is just a short step from actually participating in it. Beware of those who casually converse about things that are evil and shameful in God's sight. Our separation from darkness is to be intolerant and complete.

**illus.** Some years ago I was horrified to read a paragraph in a popular Christian magazine. The article said the pastor of a large and well known church, called his staff together to view pornographic films. These weren't merely R-rated or X-rated...they were the double and triple X-rated variety. The pastor felt his staff was too naïve and needed to know more about sexual immorality. You can be sure they came away educated! But that pastoral team will never be able to erase the images burned on their minds. Once those scenes entered their minds, the images were permanent!

What that church staff did was a flagrant violation of the principle of **vs.12** and the magazine seemed to applaud their courage. The editor later apologized for allowing that paragraph to slip by their staff. The commands here are clear and not negotiable. As children of light God has commanded us to have no involvement, no neutrality, and no mention of the fruitless deeds of darkness. Just as light is separated from darkness, we are to separate from all that is dark and displeasing to the Lord.

**3. The full exposure and invitation of light - vs. 13, 14 - But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."** In the concluding two verses, Paul repeats what has already been said.

- In the first place, *light illumines*. **Everything is exposed by the light**. We see more clearly when the light is brightest. Hidden things we didn't see or recognize in the absence of light, become visible.
- In the second place, *light transforms...* **for it is light that makes everything visible**. In contrast with the veil that covers the hearts of the Jews who reject God's truth about Jesus, **II Cor. 3:18** says, **And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit**. The more light we obey, the more our lives are changed to be like Christ.
- Then finally...*light awakens...* **This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."** **vs.14** is a call to salvation and sanctification. The **sleeper** could be an unbeliever who is unconscious of their sin / insensitive to the certain judgment ahead / and unaware of the urgency of their need to repent and trust Christ. On the other hand, the sleeper could be a believer who has been lulled to sleep by the drone of the world or the seduction of fleshly sin. On them...and perhaps on you, the light of God's truth is shining. It's shining even this morning as we encounter God's truth. Like rays of a rising sun streaming through a bedroom window, God's light wants to awaken us from drowsiness to vigilance... from dreams to reality...from sin to righteousness...and from death to life.

John, the aged apostle encouraged his believing friends to **walk in the light**. Our lives must bear the scrutiny of God's light which is brighter than the Sun at noon. This is no time to be fast asleep. This is no time to wander in darkness. It's time for God's people to **live as children of light**.

The impact of this section exists in the sharp and dramatic contrast between darkness and light. The difference between our old life and our new life in Christ is to be just that dramatic. God hasn't called us to slight modification or improvement. He hasn't called us to dial up the dimmer switch a little, and behave a notch better than we used to. Too many Christians settle for that. Like a half-lit-flashlight, it benefits no one and misrepresents God. Instead of twilight, God calls us to let our lights shine brightly...to live as children of light in a dark world. The transformation He calls for is radical. It affects every dimension of our lives. He calls us to exhibit the fruit of His goodness, righteousness, and truth. With regard to the fruitless deeds of darkness, we're called to a pure life of no involvement, no neutrality, and no mention.



During that hair raising chapter as a college night watchman, I also experienced what one pastor has called "*the dark night of the soul.*" Many Christians have a chapter when indifference and failures gain an upper hand and sin seems beyond the reach of God's mercy. In the darkness of that experience, doubts are strong / God seems distant / and prayers seem to go nowhere. But I'm here to testify that light overcomes darkness. In the darkness of a time like that we need to cling to what we know is true about God and pray as the psalmist did...**Restore us, O God; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved.** - Ps. 80:3. Eph. 5:14 ends with this promise...**Christ will shine on you.** He will!

While making my rounds one night I saw a slogan on a student's door. It read this way...*The only ones who can appreciate a sunrise are those who have waited in darkness.* Perhaps you've been living in the darkness. Christ wants to save you and shine His light into your life if you'll only trust Him. His transforming power will astound you. I promise you this...you'll never be disappointed!

Or maybe you're saved already...you've trusted Christ...but you realize this AM that you've been living in shadow land. Your life isn't totally dark, but it isn't totally light either. **Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.** Will you ask Him to do that?