

Are You Still in the Dark?

Introduction

As Bamber Gascoigne or Jeremy Paxman might have said, here's your starter for ten: "Are you still in the dark?" When someone is excluded from knowing a secret or something important it is often said that they are being kept "in the dark". Scripture however, uses the thought of being in the dark for a different reason and in a different way and references to darkness in Scripture are almost always connected to the issue of sin. So if you are still in the dark then I would suggest that you are probably still living a life of sin rather than a life in the light of Christ.

That thought leads us to today when I want us to consider the main thrust of what Paul has to say in **5:3-20** where he contrasts the difference between living in the darkness of sin and living in the light of Jesus Christ.

Recap

In the previous sermon we looked at the second half of **Ephesians 4**, a passage where Paul gave advice to believers on how they should live and grow in their faith. Included in that passage are five occurrences of the words "do not" and it is those words that put off many non-believers from looking at the Bible because they feel it makes it too restrictive in how they should live. However, a close examination of Scripture will show that it is anything but restrictive and is in fact a book full of guidance on how to live a life full of light and love. At the end of **Ephesians 4** and beginning of **Ephesians 5** Paul also tells believers that they should be forgiving and loving just as Christ forgives and loves us. What a wonderful world it would be if everyone followed that particular guidance.

In today's passage Paul continues those themes with more advice and a few more occurrences of "do not". As I've already suggested, Paul also reminds us that as believers in Christ we are children of the light and he wants us all to grow and live in the light and love of Christ.

Part 1 – 5:3-6

In **4:19** Paul told the Ephesian believers that "*Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.*" Now here in **5:3** he reiterates those comments by telling them that there should be no sexual immorality or any kind of impurity. I mentioned last time that during the month long worship of Artemis in the temple there was a lot of immorality of various kinds. However, since the Ephesian believers didn't follow or worship Artemis anymore Paul reminds them that they should no longer be involved in such activities. In our own lives we may obviously have never worshipped a goddess like Artemis although we may well have indulged in the kind of immorality that Paul is talking about here.

Having repeated his strictures against immorality Paul then adds greed, obscenity, foolish talk and coarse joking to his list of behavioural activities in which the Ephesians may have indulged. The Apostle told them in **4:29** that they were not to "... *let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.*" Unwholesome talk, obscenity and coarse joking does not help anyone and so should not form part of the lifestyle of a believer in Christ. Such things form part of the lives of the modern world and whilst we are in the world we are

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not of the world. The Apostle John quotes the words of Jesus when reminding us of our position in the world. He writes in **John 15:19** *"If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you."* At the end of **4:29** Paul told us to only talk of things that may be of benefit of others. Now here at the end of **5:4** he tells us that rather than saying anything bad we should be offering up *"thanksgiving"*. He doesn't say to Whom this thanksgiving should be offered but I think it probably goes without saying that he is referring to God. Do we thank Him enough? I sometimes think that we don't, that we tend to take too much for granted and not thank Him enough for all that He does for us each day and for the greatest gift ever: salvation through Jesus Christ.

It is true to say that in these opening two verses of the passage Paul is repeating things he has said before. However, repetition can be a good teaching method and we do need reminding, especially in the early days of our new lives as followers of Christ.

As I've mentioned before Paul, was always having to contend with false teachers; those who taught that for people to receive salvation they needed more than Jesus Christ. These false teachers operated wherever Paul went and we know that the Apostles Peter and John also had to contend with them. It is for this reason that Paul tells the Ephesian believers *"Let no-one deceive you with empty words"* (**5:6a**). The truth can only be found in Jesus Christ and since others were teaching that something more was needed Paul was anxious to warn the Ephesians *"because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient"* (**5:6b**). Since only Christ can bring salvation anything else that is suggested is being disobedient to God by ignoring and denying what He has said in Scripture.

Part 2 – 5:7-14

It is possible to read some of what Paul is saying as being rather negative. However, a closer look will show that what he has to say is quite positive. The first *"do not"* appears here when Paul says in **5:7** *"do not be partners with them"*. He is referring to his earlier comments in **5:6** where he spoke about false teachers and I would suggest that he is warning against forming any sort of relationship with such people.

Jesus is the truth and nothing He ever said is false. He is also the light which is why Paul's main comments here in **5:8-14** relate to light and darkness. Before we come to faith in Christ we are sinners who are totally separated from God and quite simply as sinners we live in the darkness of the world of sin. That means that whilst God is the light and we are in the darkness we are very far away from Him. So bad has this situation become that not only do we live in the darkness but Paul tells us in **5:8a** that in that state we actually become darkness itself. However, we then see those marvellous words *"but now"* which signal a change of some description. I've mentioned on numerous occasions that I find two of the most powerful words in Scripture to be *"but God"*; in other words God intervened and changed events or situations that we couldn't. On this occasion the big change is our coming to faith in Christ which means that we move from the darkness of sin to live in the light of Christ and, as Paul points out, we actually become light since as believers in Christ we *"are light in the Lord"* (**5:8b**); consequently we should now *"Live as children of light"* (**5:8c**). Jesus is THE light and He Himself confirmed that when He said *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* (**John 8:12**). Later in **John 12** the Lord added to that statement by telling us that *"I have come into the world as a light, so that no-one who believes in me should stay in darkness."* (**John**

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12:46). The coming of Jesus to be the light of the world should not be regarded as unexpected since the prophet Isaiah recorded God's words when he wrote "*I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.*" (Isaiah 49:6b). Isaiah was of course referring to Jesus.

At the beginning of 5:9 Paul talks of the "*fruit of the light*" and adds that it consists of "*all goodness, righteousness and truth*". Those qualities are very similar to those which Paul talks of in Galatians 5:22-23 when he lists the fruit of the Spirit. We are told "... *the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control*". As you may be able to understand these are very close and in fact complement one another. Such qualities grow in us as we grow in our faith and draw ever closer to Christ.

The thought of light and darkness reminds me of the wonderful song written by Tim Hughes that we have sung from time to time and which reflects what Paul is saying here. The opening lines say: "*Light of the world, You stepped down into darkness*". Jesus is indeed the Light of the world and He willingly came down from the glorious light of heaven to the darkness of a sinful world. He did that willingly to bring salvation to all who would accept Him as their Lord and Saviour. Whilst there are no direct Scripture references containing all of those words used by Tim Hughes in one verse, we know that we live in a world of darkness and yet Jesus was willing to come down to join us to save us by bringing salvation to those who would believe in Him. Until we come to know and accept Him as Lord and Saviour we are living in that darkness of sin with no way of moving into the light.

Paul eloquently reminds us in Romans 6:23a that: "*the wages of sin is death*" and that is the only reward that sin brings! That is why the Apostle now refers to the "*fruitless deeds of darkness*" (5:11) where "*deeds of darkness*" means sin. As followers of Christ we should have nothing to do with sin and should in fact behave in such a way that our lifestyle is in direct contrast to those who do live their lives in the darkness of sin thereby highlighting sin. This involves a major transformation in our lives, something I've mentioned before and which Paul talks of in Romans 12:2. In that verse he tells us: "*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*" The late John Stott, the well known preacher and commentator, reminds us that this transformation is such that as believers in Christ not only do we now live in the light but we actually become light. Stott quotes in his Commentary another theologian F F Bruce who writes of believers that: "*Their lives and not just their environment had been changed from darkness to light.*"¹ Stott adds: "*this radical transformation had taken place in the Lord, by virtue of their union with him who claimed to be the light of the world.*"² Whilst Stott writes that Christ "*claimed to be the light of the world*", I've already quoted John 8:12 where the Lord Himself makes clear that He IS the light of the world.

Instead of resorting to sin Paul urges us to "*find out what pleases the Lord*" (5:10). I quoted Romans 12:2a a moment ago and that verse continues that by being transformed "... *you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.*" (Romans 12:2b). What pleases God is that we live in the light of His Son and follow what He tells us in Scripture.

¹ Stott, John, The Message of Ephesians, electronic edition

² Stott

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As you may imagine Paul is very anxious that we no longer sin, so much so that he also urges us to not even talk of such things. He obviously feels that even talking of “*what the disobedient do in secret*” (5:12) means that we have thought about such things and therefore opened up our minds to sin. Such a thing is to be avoided at all costs.

Part 3 – 5:15-21

In this next section, 5:15-21, Paul gives us further advice on how we should live. He opens by telling us that we should “*Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise but as wise*” (5:15). What Paul is saying here is quite simple; we are to use the knowledge we have of Christ and apply it to how we live in the world. We need to remember that as Christians people will be scrutinising our behaviour and how we live so that they can mock and point fingers when we do something wrong. Paul gives more advice on our behaviour in his Epistle to the Colossians where he writes: “*Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*” (Colossians 4:5-6). If we follow that advice and are wise then we will indeed live lives that reflect the light of Christ.

Paul’s guidance in this Epistle to the Ephesians on living in the light of Christ also includes more “*do not*” words of advice which can be read as “*don’t do that, do this*”. For instance, we are told not to be foolish; to be foolish means following the ways of the world. For instance, Paul told the believers in the church in Corinth “*For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight.*” (1 Corinthians 3:19). As believers in Christ we should give up the ways of the world and follow the ways of Christ. Writing in his first Epistle, the Apostle John says this: “*Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives for ever.*” (1 John 2:15-17).

Rather than being foolish we are told in 5:17 to understand the will of God and then follow what He wants us to do. I accept that that isn’t easy as it means drawing nearer to God and listening to Him through His Holy Spirit. However, drawing nearer to God should come naturally as we grow in our faith; and that comes through the Holy Spirit the more we spend time with the Lord in prayer and meditation. The Lord is there with us and is always listening and helping and so we too need to listen to what He is telling us and to how He answers our prayers; remember that “NO” may well be an answer to prayer!

The issue of Christians and alcohol is a bit of a vexed subject. When I attended Moorlands College in Dorset alcohol was not allowed on the premises, not even in the kitchen for cooking. However, when I attended Birmingham Christian College we would have Rioja for Communion! In 5:18 we are told quite reasonably not to get drunk since getting drunk can lead to debauchery which can lead anywhere as we tend to be out of control. Paul urges us instead to be filled with the Holy Spirit rather than alcoholic spirit! However, Scripture cannot be said to be against drinking wine, after all Jesus’ first recorded miracle came at a wedding in Cana where He turned water into wine, something we can read about in John 2:1-11. Later we can read Paul’s advice to Timothy: “*Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.*” (1 Timothy 5:23). With that latter comment we need to consider the context. The water at the time did not come clean

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from a tap but was murky and not very clean at all. Consequently, it may well have been the water that contributed to Timothy's frequent illnesses and stomach upsets. That is why Paul suggests using "a little wine" to help that condition. He is most definitely not advocating that we drink vast quantities of wine and become drunk. Rather than being filled with wine or alcohol he wants us to be filled with the Holy Spirit and it is in this way that we will be able to discern God's will for us as we serve Him.

As we reach **5:19** Paul tells us to "*Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.*" I think I mentioned last time that this conjures up an interesting picture. I'm not convinced that Paul means that our conversations with one another should be in the form of hymns or Psalms but rather suggests how we should worship God. If we follow the advice in **5:18b** and are "*filled with the Spirit*" then our worship will be wonderfully enhanced and we will be able to encourage one another with music that is full of praise. The Old Testament contains the Book of Psalms which many consider to be God's hymn book and whilst we read the Psalms when they were written and when they were used by the early church they would have been sung in much the same way that we sing hymns today. Paul also refers to spiritual songs and it is possible that many of these were written by early believers as part of their praise and worship to God. There can be little doubt that well sung songs of praise and worship can be very uplifting and encouraging.

Finally in this passage we are told to be "*always giving thanks to God the Father for everything*" (**5:20**). I sometimes think that we don't say thank you enough as we take so much for granted. When that happens then we need to consider just how much God has done for us and keeps on doing. At the root of our faith is Jesus Christ, God's only Son Who He sent to die in our place to pay for our sins. God didn't have to do that but He loves us so much with a love that is unconditional that He did it anyway. Surely we should never cease to say thank you for such an amazing gift. God's gifts don't stop there though since He gives us so much each day: homes, family, food, health and best of all the assurance of a future to be spent with Christ in heaven.

Conclusion

Do you live in the darkness or light? With God there can be no half way state; we cannot live in the half light of dusk or dawn. Unrepentant sinners live in the darkness of the world and continue to "*enjoy*" the ways of the world such as immorality, impurity, greed, debauchery and all that goes with it. The end result, the reward, of such a lifestyle will be both a physical and spiritual death leading to a permanent exclusion from God's presence. On the other hand those who come to faith in Christ as their Lord and Saviour will live an eternal life in His presence. If there is one message coming out of this glorious passage from Paul it is that we should allow Christ to transform our lives by coming to faith in Him and then live life in the light of His love. If you don't already then I urge you now to give up life in the darkness, accept Christ as your Saviour and live the rest of your life in His light.