

From darkness into light

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[0 : 00] It'd be worth just keeping your Bible open on that page there if you have it as we look through those verses together. Looking back into kind of the midst of time, of history, probably the highlight of my school life, what was an English essay that I remember well, we had to write about the use of light and dark as imagery of good and evil in the Star Wars films.

And I remember the essay well, not because I've got a clue what I wrote, I'm sure it was fairly hopeless, but we got to spend pretty much an entire week of English lessons watching *The Empire Strikes Back*.

And I just thought that was an incredible bit of teaching that has stuck with me ever since. It was like kind of living the dream for a teenage boy. Perhaps you're a bit more high-brow than Star Wars, apparently you find the same idea, this kind of light and dark imagery a lot in Shakespeare as well.

So one student of *Romeo and Juliet* writes this, that light is seen when there is love, hope and joy, darkness is present when hatred and death are afoot.

I'll have to take his word for that. But if you want to hear more about Star Wars, I'm welcome to chat about that later. You know, whether it's Star Wars or Shakespeare, and I'm sure a whole range of things in between, this contrast of light and darkness is such a powerful picture.

[1 : 21] And it's the dominating picture, it's the dominating image of this passage that we've just read and that we're going to look through now, this contrast of light and dark. Kind of home in really, I suppose, on verse 8, I think is kind of the key verse, this hinge.

It says this, There's this dramatic contrast between what those who believe in Jesus are and what they were.

There's this dramatic contrast between how those who believe in Jesus live and how the world around them operates. And this difference, Paul, who writes this letter, is saying that this difference should be as clear as night and day, as darkness and light.

And so those are the two kind of headings that we're going to look through this morning, out of the darkness and into the light. Just those kind of two headings to look through. But before we dive straight into that, let me give you a quick kind of reminder, a quick recap of the big picture of Ephesians, which is going to help us make sense of these verses.

The first three chapters of this book of Ephesians have all been about what God has done for us. They're all about the good news of the gospel. We've seen how in Christ we are blessed.

[2 : 50] In him we're forgiven through his sacrifice. Through him we're brought into his family, the church. And all of this is not because of our actions, not because of what we do, but all through what God has done.

Kind of foundational verses in chapter 2, verses 9 and 10. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no man may boast.

That's kind of the big headline almost of Ephesians. It's this big thrust of the letter that we don't save ourselves, but rather Christianity, the gospel, is all about what God has done for us.

It's that amazing grace that we sang about at the start of our service. That is the foundation of Christianity. That's what everything about Christianity is based on. And now we move into the second half of the letter.

Really from chapters 4 through to 6. They're all about how do we live in response to that grace. And it's so important that we remember this.

[3 : 56] This is why I give this kind of recap now. It's so important when we get to these parts of the Bible that give us kind of instruction on how to live. It's so important that we remember that order. It is not saying, look, if you do this, then God will love you.

No, it is in light of what God has done. In light of his incredible love and grace to us in Jesus. Then this is how we live in response to that.

It's not living this way to try and reach God's love. It is always living this way from the solid foundation of God's love. And so chapters 4, 5, 6, it's so important here that we never forget those gospel foundations laid down first in chapters 1, 2, and 3.

So that's kind of a bit of a recap, a reminder of what we're building on this morning. And having reminded ourselves of that, let's kind of dig in then and look at that first section.

And as I said, this is kind of about coming out of the darkness. It's really easy. And it certainly has happened a lot in the past. It's a lot of times, I think, for Christianity or the church to be purely defined by what it's against.

[5 : 06] And so the church or Christians is the place where, you know, the newspapers go when they want a quote to be told how, you know, terrible things are. Or how awful the world we live in. Or how things aren't like they used to be.

And yet actually, Christianity is an inherently joyful message. It's a message that brings hope. The word gospel, remember, it means good news. So Christianity isn't defined by what it's against.

But it's defined by good news. It's defined by what's made possible through Jesus. And yet it's also easy for us to go too far the other way. And actually, kind of the church can just end up saying, well, yeah, anything goes.

So often we're keen not to offend, not to stick out from the crowd. Keen not to kind of fit into that old stereotype of fire and brimstone. That in the end, almost the church can end up not really standing for anything.

It doesn't kind of look any different from the world around it. It's not showing this new way of life that Ephesians speaks about, which stands out and attracts people in. Instead, it's just kind of following along behind everyone else and modeling itself on the world around us.

[6 : 16] Well, this passage is one of the sections in the Bible that kind of really brings that into focus. It really clearly says that there are areas where the church is to make a stand.

There are areas where the people who make up the church do need to be distinct. And a key area in our day and age, a key place where the church is tempted to kind of stay quiet, and yet is actually called to be really distinct, is our view on sex.

And that's one of the main emphases of these verses. One of the main advantages of kind of teaching through a book consecutively, well, advantage or disadvantage, I suppose, depending on where you're sitting, is it brings us to these issues that we'd perhaps rather move to one side.

So it's worth me kind of just, I can guarantee to you, I didn't wake up at the start of this week and think, oh, I'd love to stand up in front of a room of people and maybe speak about sexual immorality this Sunday. That would be fun.

I imagine you didn't wake up with your fingers crossed this morning. Please, please, sexual immorality. No, no. But the good thing about the Bible, working through this book of Ephesians like we're doing, is it brings us to that reminder that actually the gospel, the call to follow Jesus, it affects every area of life.

[7 : 32] So let's kind of dive in. Let's get stuck in. And Paul begins this section. We finished in verse 2 last week. Verse 3, Paul begins really abruptly. Why is Paul speaking specifically about these things?

Is he kind of obsessed with this or something? Well, it's important to maybe get to grips with what the place Ephesus, where this letter first went to, was like. Ephesus was a place where promiscuity was everywhere.

It was the center of worship of Artemis, the fertility goddess. There was the great kind of temple of Artemis, would have been the dominating building of the city.

The worship there would have included temple prostitution. It would have included drunken orgies, all sorts of stuff. Ephesus was the kind of place that would make Game of Thrones look like CBBs.

You know, everywhere you looked, there would have been this mixture of idolatry and sex and impurity. And so Paul's not just picking a kind of a random topic here. This isn't like a hobby horse that Paul has.

[8 : 44] He's putting his finger on something which is right at the heart of Ephesian life. He's speaking about something which is incredibly visible. And yet he's saying that this isn't how the church is to live.

Here's one of these places where the church is called to be distinct. We saw that last week in terms of how we speak, in terms of how we treat other people. The church is to be different.

Here's another place. While the world around this church in Ephesus is promiscuous and impure with the crude joking and speech that goes along with that, these Ephesians who have put their trust in Jesus, who have moved from darkness to light, are called to look very different.

Well, obviously we don't live in first century Ephesus. There's no kind of Artemis worship that I'm aware of nearby. But we do still live, I think it's fair to say, in a society that kind of idolizes sex.

Where sex is presented as the be-all and end-all. If you're not sure about that, you can just look at kind of the TV schedules. If you watch programs like Love Island or The Soaps, you can read sort of teenagers' magazines.

[9 : 56] If you look at advertising, as it's well-known, sex sells. Sex is presented as this ultimate goal that everyone needs. Just like in Ephesus, it's everywhere we look.

And it's kind of unconstrained. We're told we can't put any limits on that. Love is love, we're told. And to try and regulate that in any way is dangerous or unhealthy.

And the world's call to the church is just to get with the times and stop being so old-fashioned. And it's really important, I think, that we understand this. That Paul isn't saying here, and the Bible never says, that sex is this bad thing, this awful thing we shouldn't talk about.

I love the author C.S. Lewis, who I think is so insightful, wrote so many years ago and yet is still so relevant today. He says this, if anyone says that sex in itself is bad, Christianity contradicts him at once.

The Bible has this really positive view of sex, of matter, of the body. The Bible says that it's a gift from God, that it's part of God's good design.

[11 : 05] But the Bible also gives us a framework or a pattern or regulations as to how that works best. And consistently, throughout the Bible, that pattern is a man and a woman being united to one another in marriage.

It's not, as it was in Ephesus, as is so often promoted today, something which is cheap, something which is a joke, something which is to boast about or brag about. And it's not something that is casual.

It's not something where we're to use others to satisfy our own desires. Instead, it is something which is an expression of love in a committed, lifelong relationship.

That's the Bible's framework for sex. Why does it give that? It's not designed as a kind of a set of rules to kill any fun. It's actually because that's how it works best.

And you see evidence of this around us in the world today. If you think of kind of high-profile things like the Me Too movement or political scandals or all sorts of stuff that's going on or much more local things, kind of broken homes, you can think of so many people who are hurt and damaged and struggling because our culture has jettisoned this framework that God's given.

[12 : 21] Because just like in Ephesus, sex isn't part of a committed relationship. It's something casual. It's this idol that is chased after at all costs that promises satisfaction and yet delivers so little.

Our culture has moved away from this biblical framework, I suppose. And there's a danger when we stand here and see this that we can think, well, I could read this and I could say, well, thank goodness I'm married and I'm not having an affair.

This doesn't apply to me. The church can almost seem quite arrogant. It can come across as saying, look, the problem is out there. The problem is with other people. Actually, I can't stand here and say that.

The Bible says that this is something that all of us struggle with. The Bible says whether it's temple prostitutes, whether it's an affair with someone else's husband or wife, whether it's looking at what we shouldn't on the Internet, whether it's looking covetously, lustfully at people we see on the street, whether it's dwelling on fantasies or daydreams that we could never describe as pure, that this is something that we all struggle with.

That nobody in the church has the right to look down on other people. That the church doesn't have the right to look down on society. This is Paul writing to the church, a warning to the church.

[13 : 44] This is something that we all struggle with. And that really then kind of brings us to a halt, doesn't it, when we get to verse 5? For you may be sure of this, that anyone who is sexually immoral or impure, who is covetous, that is an idolater, has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

What's Paul saying there? Does that basically mean that we're all stuffed? If this is something that we all struggle with, is there no hope? Well, no, this verse is talking about a kind of a settled and unrepentant pattern of behavior.

Paul's here speaking about a way of life that says, actually, I'm not going to let God have any influence over that part of my life. A way of life that says, I'm just going to do my own thing.

I'm my own boss. And why are the consequences to that so severe? Why does that mean no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God? Well, it's because that means that we're saying, well, God is not my king.

He is not in charge. He has no influence over me. And so it makes sense that that person would not then be part of or have a place in his kingdom because he's rejected God as king.

[14 : 55] And so reading this, it shouldn't give us a kind of arrogance, looking down on other people. It's something that all of us struggle with. And yet it should be something that all of us are struggling against, not happy just to go with the flow.

More and more, as society moves in the direction it goes, the church's attitude towards sex will be distinct. It will stand out. And that can be a scary place to be. The encouragement of a passage like this is to say that actually the church has always been in that scary place.

The church has always been called from the very beginning to be distinct. And this is just one example of that. There's this call that we're called to come out of the darkness.

And it's worth noting as well, I think, before we move on, that this has probably always been a difficult and a kind of countercultural and a fairly unpopular message for people. Verse 6, Paul feels he has to, as soon as he's said this, he has to go straight in to say, let no one deceive you with empty words.

For because of these things, the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. And the point is that like back in Ephesus, from the very beginning of the church, there's always been people who've said, oh, you don't need to listen to that bit.

[16 : 08] Or people have said, oh, don't worry about what the Bible says about your private life or other things. That's nothing to do with God. Do your own thing. Again, Paul's warning here is stark.

Don't be deceived by that, he says. That's his message to the Ephesian church. That's his message to us today who get kind of bombarded with messages from so many different directions. He says, don't be deceived by those who say that because one day, he says, Jesus is coming back for those who've trusted in him and so who have lived for him.

And on that day, those who've ignored him and so lived their own way, they will be cut off. That just as they have rejected God, that ultimately he'll reject them.

And so this kind of darkness, this warning about the darkness that Paul paints is a really stark picture, isn't it? It's this call to come out of the darkness, out of the way of life that kind of surrounds the Ephesians, that surrounds us, the way of life that is what we lived before we knew Jesus.

But again, let's move into the second half because he's always so keen to emphasize in Ephesians that it is not a negative message, but instead we're called to come out of the darkness and into the light.

[17 : 25] It's a positive picture. It's a positive movement. And let's see then how that's described in the second half, coming into the light. And again, the kind of hinge here, the key verse, as we said at the beginning, is there, verse 8, for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

Walk as children of light. Again, remember, I just can't say this enough. The message of Ephesians, of the Bible, of the church, of the gospel, it is never to say, look, clean yourself up, make yourself light, and then God will accept you.

The message of the gospel is always the other way around. That you are light in the Lord, Paul says. If we trust in Jesus, he has cleaned us up. Whatever our past life, whatever we've done, that his life and death perfectly deals with all of that.

And now in response to that, from that foundation, Paul says, walk as children of the light. Now people sometimes kind of sum up the big theme of Ephesians as be who you are.

This is who Christ has made you. Now live that out. The gospel transforms us. It moves us from death to life, from darkness to light. Now walk in that light. So what does that look like then?

[18 : 45] Well, three main ideas which we're just going to kind of rattle through that Paul puts in the second half of this passage. And the first idea is that living as light is fruitful.

Living as light is fruitful. Verse 9, the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true. And that's contrasted to the unfruitful works of darkness in verse 11.

And Paul's call there is to expose those works. And it's important that we understand what he means there. That doesn't mean that Christians are to be like kind of detectives, kind of snooping around, spying on people, you know, pointing out where everyone is going wrong.

What Paul actually means here is exposing those works, exposing those old kind of dark ways of life for how unfruitful they are. It's not exposing people, it's exposing the lies that this darkness tells.

So, you know, you can do this for yourself. Think of the times, and we can all think of these times when we've kind of, we've given in to temptation, when we've done what we know we shouldn't do, when we've not lived in light but gone back into the darkness.

[19 : 55] What's the result of that time and time again? Well, we don't think, I'm so glad I did that, and that was so beneficial. If you're anything like me, you're overwhelming feeling, it is kind of shame, of regret, saying I will not do that again.

When we go back into temptation, these things don't offer us the fulfillment and the satisfaction that they promise. Paul says, that's what we're to expose, that unfruitfulness, that the way of life that the world offers is not life to the full, whatever it might promise, whatever people might say.

How do we expose that? Well, it's when these unfruitful works, he says, are exposed to the light. His point is, as it's been previously in Ephesians as well, is that as we live out a Christian biblical ethic in the areas of sex, but also in all sorts of other areas of life too.

It shows that there is a better way. There is a more fruitful way. That there is life as it's supposed to be lived. Life in line with the plans of our maker.

There's a kind of sociologist and writer called Glyn Harrison. He's written a book all about this. It's called A Better Story. It's all about how the church has so often said, don't do this, don't do that, don't do that.

[21 : 17] You shouldn't be doing this. The church, in a lot of ways, has rightly earned this title of being a kind of a killjoy, constantly focused on the negative. And his argument, and it's a biblical argument, is to say that actually the church needs to offer a better story.

That's the title of the book. As members of the church, we're not just called to kind of condemn darkness, but to expose it to the light. That means that people witnessing the goodness of the Bible's teaching about relationships or marriage or sex or anything else that they may see how actually it's living this way that offers a fulfilling life, that offers a fruitful life.

It doesn't mean it offers an easy life, but a life with purpose. Living it in the light is fruitful, and in being fruitful and exposing the unfruitful life of the darkness, it invites people to come into the light as well.

So living in the light is fruitful. Secondly, it's wise. Verse 15, look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise, but wise. Verse 17, don't be foolish, that's the opposite of wise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Now this wisdom that Paul calls us to is about understanding God's will for us. And so often we think in, perhaps in Christian circles, the will of the Lord, we kind of think of that in a very, very kind of personal and specific way.

[22 : 48] What is the Lord's will in my job or relationship or decision? It's good to think about those things, it's good to pray about those things, ask for wisdom in those things. That's not quite what Paul means here though.

Throughout Ephesians, Paul has spoken about God's will and God giving wisdom in a much bigger way in this kind of cosmic significance kind of way. The will of God and God's wisdom is seen in verse 3 through the incredible mystery of the gospel.

Chapter 3, verse 10, we read that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might be known. That as God brings people together through the gospel, as Jesus Christ comes to offer forgiveness to fallen people, as God unites his people into the church, that is him displaying his wisdom, his perfect plan to unite all things in Jesus.

The distinctive way of life of the church is not just so we can kind of be a holy huddle or look different, it's difference with a purpose, it's difference to point to Jesus.

And so that is what Paul talks about by being wise, to know God's will, it's to live in a way as his people, as his church, that promotes this unity, that promotes this commitment to one another, that paints this attractive picture of the church and through that of the gospel and of Jesus himself.

[24 : 22] Ultimately, that being wise is to live in a way that makes people look and say, okay, maybe there is something in this Christianity after all. Living in the light follows this purpose of not just living for our benefit and not just trying to get what we want, not using others for ourselves but pointing beyond ourselves to Jesus, to his perfect will and his wisdom seen in the gospel.

So living in the light is fruitful, it's wise. Lastly, and Dustin prayed this earlier, living in the light is marked by the Holy Spirit. At the very beginning of Ephesians, back in chapter 1, Paul says that those who trust in Jesus have been sealed by the Spirit.

That means they've been filled with the Spirit. That's true for all Christians. There are no kind of second-rate Christians without the Holy Spirit and kind of special Christians with the Holy Spirit. We've all been sealed with the Holy Spirit if we put our trust in Jesus.

We're not left to try and live this life by ourselves. But God gives us the strength through his Holy Spirit. And so verse 18, instead of being drunk with wine, instead that's kind of alluding to the old way of life, the way that the world around us lives, the way which Paul would speak about as the darkness, instead we're to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

And Christians do have the Holy Spirit. It is literally, and this is a kind of a mind-blowing thought, the Holy Spirit is literally God living in us, helping us, and we're to keep on living in his strength, keep on relying on him, keep on being filled, is kind of the sense of the word there.

[26 : 02] It's not a one-off event, but a continual way of life. Why is that so important? Well, all the way through this passage, and last week was the same, and next week will be similar as well, it's all about living differently.

These passages are all about a way of life that will stick out. And it's hard to do that. And really, we only have kind of two options as to how we try and do that. Firstly, we can just kind of grit our teeth, and we can look inward, we can try and kind of summon up all our inner resources to be better people.

So often, if we do that, we end up very inward-looking. It's very easy for us then to look down on other people for not being as good or as pure or as moral as we think we are or as we think they should be.

But that kind of personal mustering up the strength is not what the Bible says. This life of light is marked by the Holy Spirit.

We live this life relying on God's help. It's only when we do that that we can do it joyfully, that we can be outward-looking, we can look to encourage others.

[27 : 14] Paul uses the example of singing, singing to one another because of what God has done for us. Singing to one another out of a thankful heart for what we've received in the gospel and the ongoing filling and help of the Holy Spirit.

It's only as we live this life in the strength of the Holy Spirit with God's help that our very lives present this better story that God wants to be told.

It's not a better story about us and not a better story about what we've done. But that because of God's love and because he continues to be with us, we can live in this way that life works best according to his framework, pointing to him and glorifying him.

That is life in the light, that life powered by the Holy Spirit, that life that looks different to how we used to live, sticks out from the world around us, but in doing that is not to condemn others, but is to encourage others, is to invite others in, is to point others to the truth of the gospel.

That is life that is fruitful and fulfilling. That is the Christian life, not based on us doing everything right, not based on us not making mistakes, but all based on the foundation of a relationship with the God who made us, the relationship we were designed for, which then affects every single area of our life.

[28 : 43] That relationship all made possible through Jesus, his cross, his death, his resurrection, the foundation of everything that we do to live this distinctive life, to walk as children of the light.