Pastor David M. Choi

**Children of Light**

Calvary Baptist Church of New Haven

August 11, 2019

**Scripture Reading:** Ephesians 5:1-21

**Introduction:**

Over the past few months, we’ve been walking through Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. And in this series, the primary question we’ve been asking is what does it mean for us to be the church. That is, what makes our community unique in comparison – and in contradistinction – to every other community out there? And what do we have to offer the world that no one else can?

First and foremost, Paul says we have to begin by understanding the story we have now been made a part of. The true story that we are now reconciled to God and to one another because of what Christ has done for us. For only then can we understand how God is calling us to live in the present. As we saw, God is now partnering with us in Christ to be a countercultural community, so that through our life together the world would be compelled to Christ not by arguments but by beauty, namely, the beauty of the gospel as the power of God’s love is now made manifest in us.

And this is what the latter half of Paul’s letter is all about. It’s about sanctification, what it looks like for us to become more and more like Christ, what it looks like when our lives become more and more steeped with the gospel. However, as Justin pointed out for us a few weeks ago, at its core, sanctification isn’t simply about doing good things; rather, it’s about becoming the sort of person who can’t help but to do good things because you are so united to Christ and because the Spirit is at work within you.

Often, though, we confuse these things, don’t we? That is, we convince ourselves that we are good because we do good. But don’t be a fool, Paul says. Even sinners are capable of doing good things. Think of the Pharisees. Thus, in 4:22-23, Paul says that we are to put off our old self and put on the new.

In other words, no one is asking you to do more good. Here, you are being asked to take on a new heart, a new identity. You see, according to Paul, God is not in the works business, God is in the character business. Which is why he could care less if you do a lot of good things – even if those good things are done in his name – if your life isn’t witnessing to the glory of Christ through the transformation of your character. [And this will be so important for you to remember when you go back to read Ephesians later in life, especially chapter four and onwards.]

In our text for this morning, Paul presents us with another set of ethical injunctions, showing us how we are to continue living in a manner that honors Christ. But instead of viewing them as ethical injunctions, I think it’d be more helpful for us to see this passage as a portrait, namely, the portrait of a disciple who is genuinely in Christ and being changed by Christ. Like before, Paul’s basis for this new and countercultural way of living is based upon the new identity we’ve been given through the Spirit. However, what’s new here is that Paul sets the stage a bit differently and gives us different imagery to work with, to help us better understand the nature of this new identity.

Specifically, if you look back in v.8, he says we are now children of light. And this makes all the difference for not only making sense of our relationship with God but also the nature of our Christian witness in a world which has turned its back against him.

And here’s now where we get to the problem for Paul. We live in a world where truth is constantly compromised, distorted, or outright rejected. It happens all the time, from the newspapers we read, to the college lectures we sit in, to the television shows we watch, to the conversations we carry with friends at school or colleagues at work, and so forth. But here’s the sad truth of the matter: we, who are called to be children of light, we participate in all of that – from the way we live to the things we say or don’t say. But if you know anything about light, then you know that light does not compromise itself to darkness. So, why do we? In part, it’s because we don’t know what it means to be children of light, and the other part is that some of us have a hard time actually believing it’s true.

Which is why, in the time that we have together, I want to help us better understand not only the nature of this new identity we’ve been given, but also the power of this new identity we’ve been given in Christ as children of light, so that way we would learn to live lives of uncompromising truth and unapologetic freedom. To do so, we’ll take up these three questions: 1) What does it mean to be children of light? 2) How does God’s light manifest itself in our lives? 3) How does that light work, in and through us, to counteract the broken darkness of this world?

**1) Becoming Children of Light**

Well, if we quickly go back to 1:5, Paul says that we have been adopted as sons and daughters through Christ Jesus. One of the ways scripture would have us think about this new community that God is building is through the image of kingdom. However, in Ephesians, Paul gives us another way to think about this, namely, through the image of household and family. Which means God is not only building up his kingdom, but he is also building up his family.

For when we were living in unrepentant sin, he was our enemy. We remained outside of his presence, and we were excluded from his family, from his inner circle. But now, for those of us who are in Christ, he has adopted us as his own children through baptism and blood. And because of that, God went from being our enemy to being our Father, and because of Christ our legal status switched from enemy-orphans to beloved children of the Most High.

This is why Paul says be imitators of God, *because* you are now hisbeloved children. Understand the command from what follows. You are to imitate God because, by no work of your own, you have become his child. Not you are to imitate God so that you can become his beloved child. Do you see the subtle but crucial difference? This is the difference between life and death, law and gospel, Christians and Pharisees. Because we are his beloved children, imitate him. In other words, God has made us a part of his family, and if we are truly a part of his family, and if God is truly our Father, then our lives will naturally come to bear the family resemblance.

Similar to how children bear the physical resemblance of their parents, and remarkably take on much of the same characteristics as their mothers and fathers, especially when they’re young and want to do everything just like them. So, too, if we are children of God, then we will bear the resemblance of our Father, and want to do everything just like him. Not simply because God tells us he is our Father, but because he demonstrates his Fatherhood through the way he loves us and pursues us in Christ. We imitate God because we are his *beloved* children, and we know this to be true because the foundation of what it means to be an adopted child of God is in having experienced this love for ourselves.

So, what then are the characteristics of God that we come to take on? For Paul, all of this is summed up in one word: light. Because God is light. We take on the characteristics of God by God pouring his light into us, into his children. I’ll come back to this later on and explain more what I mean by this. But the question we’re now left dealing with is how this comes about. It comes about through faith, as the Spirit joins our life to Christ’s own.

Every week, we recite together the Nicene Creed. And when we come to the second person of the Trinity, there’s that line in there that reads: God from God, light from light, true God from true God. And when we recite that line together, what we are doing is we are not only confessing that Jesus Christ is a participant in the light of God, but that he *is* – by nature – the very light of God himself.[[1]](#footnote-1) In John 8:12, and elsewhere, Jesus says, “I am the light…” In this, Jesus is saying I am the Son of God; therefore, I perfectly resemble the light of my Father, and the Father perfectly resembles the light that is in me.

And so, when we become joined to Christ, we become partakers in the light that properly belongs to the Father because it also properly belongs to the Son. Or, to put it more simply, the light of God is poured into us as we image the Son, because the light of Christ is the light of God. So, if we are in Christ, we are not only children, but we are necessarily children of light. If you resemble Christ, then you will resemble the Father.

**2) The Manifestation of God’s Light in Us**

So, we now come to the second point, which is perhaps less abstract, by circling back to the question we asked earlier: How does God’s light concretely manifest itself in us exactly? Or, what are the characteristics of God’s light that we now imitate as his beloved children? In the next part of this passage, we see that there are two primary ways this happens: first, through self-sacrificial love, and second through, what I’ll call, truth-living.

So, to the first point, Paul says sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you. Notice that Paul uses negative language to talk about self-sacrificial love, by telling us what disciples don’t do. By using negative language like this, Paul is drawing a stark contrast between self-sacrificial love, how children of light are called to live, and self-indulgent sensuality, how children of darkness live. And by showing us how the world lives, Paul is saying don’t live that way anymore! You are no longer children of darkness but are children of light. And so, to continue living that way would directly contradict the new identity you’ve been given as God’s adopted children.

You see, whether it is sexual immorality, impurity, or covetousness the common factor which unites all of these things is that these things assume that the world and others exist for one’s own immediate gratification. All of these things are me-oriented, but one of the defining characteristics of God’s children, children of light, discipleships who are truly born again, is that they are others-oriented, and put the needs of others above their own.

So, by showing us what Christians are to avoid, namely, self-indulgent sin, Paul is saying we manifest the light of God in our lives by running towards and by embodying what is the exact opposite, which is laid out for us in verse two: We walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Self-sacrificial love.

Secondly, God’s light manifests itself in us through truth-living. And the reason why it’s truth-living as opposed to truth-speaking is because discipleship is not simply a matter of saying truthful things, although that’s absolutely a part of it. But Paul says *walk* as children of light, not talk. In other words, genuine followers of Jesus Christ don’t simply speak the truth, but they live it out and back it up with their lives. So, what does that look like?

Paul says let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. In other words, avoid false teachings, which indeed in our society and culture are aplenty. But specifically, in the context of this passage, Paul is saying avoid those people who speak things which would compromise your faith and make questionable your standing as a child of God.

Let no one deceive you with empty words. Which means you have to have the ability to discern what is true from what is false. And the way we discern what is true from what is false is by returning to Christ and going to God’s word, again and again, to hear the truth that is spoken to us in this text.

This is why, church, it is so important for us to be faithful in our reading of scripture, because reading scripture daily fortifies our hearts against the seductive lies of this world, and it builds a stronghold in our minds that enables us to detect deceit in an instant. The reason why so many of us are spiritually brittle and compromise the truth, and don’t know what to say when worldly philosophies run up against our faith, is because we don’t read scripture. If you think you can be a Christian, while not having to eat God’s word on a daily basis, I promise you you won’t last long. You’ll be swept away by this world like everyone else.

Thus, Paul says do not become partners with them, that is, don’t be complicit in deceitful activity by agreeing with them or by advancing lies that are not true. So, what might that look like in our context today? Some of you guys really love to gossip. And others of you make yourselves feel better because you think it’s okay to listen to gossip just so long as you’re not contributing to it. But in some sense, you’re even worse, because you’re giving people an audience to share and spread demeaning lies about other people! But here it’s saying if you aren’t going to put an end to it, then you need to walk away, even if they are your friends. Do not become partners with them. Better for you to lose some friends than to burn in hell for all of eternity.

And for this next upcoming year, some of you guys really need to make some serious decisions about who you’re going to hang out with. You are children of light, yet you continue to congregate with children of darkness. Now, don’t get me wrong, I am not saying Christians shouldn’t have non-Christian friends. But ask yourselves this: are they the sort of friends who are receptive to your faith? Are they respectful towards it by not standing in the way of you obeying God’s word and carrying out his commands? Or, are they the sort of friends who actively seek to ruin your convictions by encouraging you to engage in practices of darkness, practices that would have you directly disobey God?

Don’t try and be a hero, thinking, “No, I’ll continue to hang out with them, cause eventually I think I can convert them to Christ.” Again, Paul says, don’t be foolish. Such thinking is already deceitful. And what have we been talking about? Don’t agree with deceit. For in 1 Cor. 15:33, it says bad company *ruins* good character; therefore, flee from sin (1 Cor. 10:14)! So, some of you need to make that hard decision of excising some toxic friends from your life. Doesn’t mean you shouldn’t witness to them, only that you probably shouldn’t be friends with them. This is what the light of God in the form of truth-living looks like. It does not compromise to darkness by participating in it or lingering around it. It shines through it.

Now, just because you are children of light, of course, does not mean you will go about all of this perfectly or make no mistakes. For though we are in Christ, we still remain sinners, and so even though God’s light is poured into us there is still another side of us that remains in darkness.

This is why we are often conflicted when we have desires to do evil, but at the same time we know that we shouldn’t. That’s the light and darkness warring within you. So then is this the way it’s always going to be? Well, yes and no. Yes in that as long as we remain on this side of eternity, and until Christ returns, we will remain sinners. But no in that as we grow in Christ our resolve against sin grows stronger. Let me put it this way.

Immature Christians when they’re about to do something that’s wrong will know that it’s wrong, but they’ll do it anyway because their greater concern is immediate pleasure rather than thinking about the long term consequences. However, that sliver of thought that makes them attentive to the wrongfulness of their actions shows that God’s light has already broken into them. And so, what discipleship is about is going from immaturity to greater maturity, that is, allowing the light that has already broken in to now grow brighter in us.

And how we go from immaturity to greater maturity is by fighting sin and by obeying Christ, so that the light of God comes to take a greater foothold in us. And as the light continues to grow in us, what begins to happen is we find greater freedom from sin.

One of the ways you can practically test this out and figure out whether or not this is actually happening for you is by asking yourself: Am I growing in my hatred towards sin? And whenever I am confronted by that sin, that sin I’ve been struggling with for quite some time, do I notice it becoming less and less attractive to me? When I think about that sin, that addiction, have I noticed that its grip has been losing its hold on me?

If you find these things to be true, then what that means is the Spirit of God is indeed doing its work within you and is purifying your heart. God’s light is further and further pushing out every single one of your dark inclinations, so that what reigns within you is no longer darkness but divine light. And the Spirit continues to do this work inside of you until you one day attain to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ, whereby your life is nothing but self-sacrificial love and truth-living.

**3) Counteracting Darkness**

Now, when we read from v.9 and onwards, we see that God’s light does not simply function to remove darkness within us, but it also functions to be poured out from us. So, imagine, God’s light is poured in, but it is also simultaneously being poured out.

In v.11, it says take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness. As we mentioned before, remove yourself from every deceit, lie, and work of the enemy. But instead expose them. Here, Paul is not saying you are now the moral police, and you should go around calling people out and whacking them on the head every time you see them sin, that is, apart from extreme situations. When Paul says expose them, he is still working within the context of the light and dark imagery, and so he is primarily talking about the way you live.

So, when you remove yourself from darkness, by refusing to participate in sinful activity, by refusing to participate in gossip, licentious activity, and so forth, people will inevitably see your life and take notice. They will see that you do not live like them, that you have a joy and freedom and even a strangeness to your living, that will make them call into question their very own life.

You see, when you are walking in the light of Christ, God’s light is being shined into the world through the light beams of self-sacrificial love and truth-living. In this, the very nature of your life is working to counteract sin and darkness. And in this way, you confront those who are living in darkness, and in this way you *expose* them. One commentator put it this way: “As [Christians] refuse to join in evil actions and display a different quality of life, they cast their illuminating beam into the dark recesses of their surrounding society and [in doing so, without fail] [expose the society’s] immoral practices for what they are.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

As we saw previously, though, there is still some darkness remaining within us. Which is why Paul warns us to look carefully at how we walk in this world, and to understand what the will of God is. Remember, light is incompatible with darkness. And so, if you are not exposing darkness, then you are spreading darkness. Apart from these, you have no other options; these are the only two options you get.

Right now we are living in a culture where people are more concerned with being polite than being truthful. And one of the greatest battles of our generation, especially for you, youth group students, is knowing what it means to not compromise the truth for politeness. Because the cultural narrative right now is if you stand up for what you believe in then you are either intolerant of others or you are a religious bigot. And, again, the sad truth of the matter is that so many of you guys believe it, which is why you are willing to be a Christian just so long as it doesn’t step on other people’s toes, which is why you have privatized your faith to secret rooms. But as we see here in this text, it is the work of darkness to keep things hidden – and it is the work of light to expose them.

Jesus says in Matthew 5:15, who lights a lamp but then puts it under a basket? You light a lamp, and put it on a stand so that the whole house is illumined. And so, the question becomes: are you letting God’s light shine in your schools by sitting with that person during lunch, who has no one else to sit with? Are you letting God’s light shine by standing up for people who are being bullied? Are you letting God’s light shine by sitting down with your friends at school, and telling them about how Jesus has changed your life? If you are children of light, then expose every darkness. Stop living under a basket.

For as we said, the only way this world will come to see the depravity of its own condition, that it is living in darkness, is by seeing the light of God being worked out in and through his people. When you choose to contain God’s light because you are timid, afraid, or embarrassed, what you are doing is you are depriving the world of the light it so desperately needs. Church, if your ultimate concern is with being seen as tolerant or polite, you have, or at least you are on your way, to compromising the truth of who God is. What this world needs isn’t more politeness and half-baked truths and self-help humanistic catchphrases. What this world needs is Jesus.

And in your mind when you refuse to stand up for what you believe in you may think you are doing the world a favor, but in reality you are doing it a great disservice, because you are depriving them of their Lord and Savior. In Christ, we have been made children of light. So let us act like it, and allow God to continue his work in us, so that as his light shines through us the world would come to see the beauty of the Lordship of Christ. Amen.

**Benediction:**

**Go now in the strong name of the Godhead, three-in-one. Go in the name of God the Father, who has made us his own, as his adopted children of light, go in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, who came, lived, died and rose again for you, who shows us what it means to image the Father’s light through the self-sacrificial love of the cross and through the truth-living power of the resurrection. Go in the name of God the Holy Spirit, who goes with you, who illumines your life, who opens your eyes to see more of Christ, who opens your heart to receive his love, who opens your hands so that you can embody him to a hurting and broken world. Go in the name of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.**

1. Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 330. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)