



Ephesians 5:8-14 - ⁸For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light ⁹(for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) ¹⁰ and find out what pleases the Lord. ¹¹ Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. ¹³ But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴ 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.”

You are light in the Lord



So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. (Colossians 2:6)

If you've ever watched TV for fifteen straight minutes, I'm willing to bet you've seen at least a couple commercials for some new prescription drug. Usually, they show some B-roll of people shopping at an outdoor market, drinking coffee and laughing, or walking through a field of flowers while the voice-over guy reads the terrifying list of potential side effects. You're then encouraged not to take this particular medicine if you're allergic to it...which seems like an unnecessary statement, but better safe than sorry, I guess. I think we're familiar with commercials for prescription drugs – but have you ever seen one that made you stop and think? Not long ago, I saw a commercial for a drug that made me think. But the name of the drug or the potential side effects wasn't why that commercial stuck with me. It's what the drug did that struck me.

It's a drug that treats a condition called "Non-24-Sleep-Wake Disorder." It's a condition that causes problems in the sleep cycle of completely blind people. Light does not enter their eyes and that leaves some blind people unable to synchronize the natural sleep cycle – meaning that their bodies can't tell the difference between day and night. They're unable to rest at night and therefore unable to function well during the day. As I watched the commercial, my heart went out to those who suffer from this condition. I was encouraged that there was something out there to help the blind function better. But then I started to wonder, "Does this commercial really apply to a large portion of the viewing audience?" First, I wondered if many blind people watch much TV, I honestly don't know. Then I found out that this condition is considered a "rare disease" by the FDA. So, why air the commercial if it's not really applicable for the vast majority of people?

The gift of being able to see is one of the blessings I thank God for, and I'm sure you do, too. We might not be physically blind, but this past week I've been thinking about another kind of blindness – the kind that the prophet Isaiah condemned in our Old Testament lesson; the kind that Jesus addressed in today's gospel; the kind that the Apostle Paul warns us to avoid – the blindness and utter darkness of sin. In each of those readings, we see a contrast between those who see Jesus as their Savior through the eyes of faith, and those who refuse to see Jesus as Savior. For those who trust in Jesus as Savior, those who see their utter helplessness to get right with God, God promises forgiveness, life, and light. He promises to lead them and not forsake them. But for those who open their eyes and see only their own righteousness, their own goodness, and how much they can offer God, Jesus promises judgment. Jesus came to bring sight to the blind and judgment to the blinded.

The Apostle Paul wrote, **For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.** Notice what he says and what he doesn't say. **You were once darkness**; not you were once *in* darkness, not you were once *a little bit shady*. You were darkness – it's what defined you before you came to faith. It's the blind, damnable darkness of sin that once ruled over you and made you who you were – a blind, darkened enemy of God. When you were darkness, you thought you didn't need God, because you could make your way on your own – you were blind. When you were darkness, it was your sin and your sinful nature that prompted every thought in your head, action of your hands, and word that came from your lips. At one time, we were all blind, darkened enemies of God. There was no



medicine that could help us function better in our blindness. But that is what you *were*. Who are you now? **You are light in the Lord.** A total, complete, and marvelous transformation has taken place. What was the difference maker? What effected this marvelous shift from spiritual death to life and blindness to sight? Just one person: Jesus Christ, the Light of the world. No longer do you belong to the darkness and blindness of sin. Instead, you've been called out of that darkness by the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ crucified and risen to take away every one of your sins. As Jesus said, **You are the salt of the earth...you are the light of the world.** And Paul reiterates, **now you are light in the Lord.** Embrace your new identity in Christ!

So now what? **Live as children of the light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord.** It's important to remember Paul's order of priorities in his writings. He reminds you first of who you are through faith in Jesus – forgiven, pure, and holy in God's sight. So Paul's appeal for purity isn't a plea for us to try harder so that maybe we'll *become* acceptable to God. Paul's appeal for purity is based on the promise that in Christ we *have been* accepted by God. You've been called out of the blindness and darkness of sin and death. Out of thanksgiving to Jesus, you put your stamp of approval on God's holy will, being a living, breathing reflection of God in this world, ripe with the fruits of goodness, righteousness, and truth. In other words, be who Christ has declared you to be: a forgiven, God-blessed, light that shines in the darkness of this world. Do you see how glorious God's purpose for your life is? You get to love like Jesus loved. You get to reflect the saving light of his grace to your spouse, your kids, your boss, your brothers and sisters here at Hope. God's purpose for your life is glorious!

Then why do I sometimes see God's glorious purpose for my life in Christ and then turn around as if I haven't seen anything at all? As blood-bought children of God, we are light in Christ. But while we live here on this earth, there's a part of us that revels in the darkness; a part of us that wants nothing to do with Jesus and the light he brings. The old sinful nature we've had in our hearts since birth wants to drive us back into the darkness of sin and the blindness of unbelief. Maybe that's why Paul says, **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.** When you hear a verse like that, maybe you start to think back like I do. How many of the sins of my past, the things I'd be ashamed if people knew, were committed under the cover of darkness – as though nobody could see? But God did. Maybe, we reason, we can keep things secret, keep it hidden, but when we do that, we're running back into the blinding darkness of sin. What's the nature of light? To shine in the darkness. We're told to **expose...the deeds of darkness,** but sometimes it's more appealing to join in. Everyone does it. So, maybe for a while I won't shine my light. I'll hide it. But can light and darkness, by their very definition, exist in the same place?

As Christians, we've had the light of God's forgiveness, God's adoption, God's never-failing love shined in our eyes, healing our blindness. Then why go back to the darkness, the blindness? We run to the darkness every time we turn a blind eye to a brother or sister caught in sin and reason that "*someone else will tell them what they're doing is wrong.*" We run to the darkness when we give in to the desires of our sinful nature. We run to the darkness when we buy into the devil's lies and half-truths about our lives. The devil tempts us to think that his deeds of darkness are what we need. He promises pleasure, but delivers only pain. He promises a care-free existence, but



only gives guilt. He promises that when we put our faith in his lies, he'll bring us fulfillment, but we end up emptier than when we started. He wants us to run back to the darkness; to be alone, blind, and in the dark.

But, in Christ, that's not who you are. Yes, on this side of heaven, you still have a sinful nature. But that's not your identity in Christ. And to prove it, look no further than these six weeks of the church year called Lent. God hasn't called you to the darkness of sin. Instead, God calls you to view a different kind of darkness; the darkness of Good Friday, when his Son Jesus took upon himself every one of our deeds of darkness and every time we failed to shine his light, and he himself was swallowed up by the darkness of death in our place – only to rise in glorious light three days later. On that darkest day in human history, your Savior won for you the light of his forgiveness for your every sin. In the light of his grace, he enables you to see sin for what it is – damnable darkness. Basking in the glow of his love, he empowers you to call a sin a sin – but ultimately to point the sinner to the sure promise of salvation in Jesus. What could ever we say to a fellow sinner who's caught up in sin? What could we say every day to ourselves when we're tempted to run back to the darkness? **Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.** There isn't a person on this planet who doesn't need what the gospel has to offer – the light of Christ shining in our hearts, bringing spiritual life where there was only death, and the brilliance of sight where there was only blindness.

Born in 1725, John Newton was the son of the commander of a merchant ship. He joined up with dad in the family business and even though enduring some hard knocks on the high seas, he began to enjoy the salty life of a sailor – and the sin that went with it. Eventually, John got into one of the more lucrative shipping opportunities – the slave trade. He forcibly took people from their homelands and sold them for profit to line his own pockets. Things were going well for the slave-trader, until a storm on one of his voyages shook him to the core. He remembered his mother teaching him the word of God and being surrounded by “church”, but was without Christ. By the Holy Spirit's power, John Newton came to trust in Jesus as his Savior. The promise of Christ crucified and risen for his forgiveness changed his life. It brought him from spiritual death to spiritual life. In the midst of utter blindness, he received sight in Christ. Those profound changes prompted John to action...and to hymn writing. Perhaps you've heard one of his most famous: *Amazing grace, how sweet the sound! That saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see.*

The light of Christ's forgiveness drives away the blindness and darkness of sin. It proclaims the reality of who you are. Every single day, you wake up with the light of Christ shining on you. Every day you wake up in the grace, the forgiveness, and the power of your baptism. Because of Christ, every day you have deliverance from the deeds of darkness from your past and your present. Thank God for the light of Christ that drives out the darkness of every sin. Thank God for his Light that reminds us every day of our true identity - you are light in the Lord!

Amen

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

(Philippians 4:7)