

# Exposing the Darkness

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**Bible Text:** Ephesians 5:8-14; Isaiah 60:1-5

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We will be back in our series, resume our series, I should say, in the book of Ephesians this morning, but as Paul draws so heavily throughout this book from the Old Testament, we will turn, first, to an Old Testament passage of Scripture that will factor into our New Testament passage this morning. So please open your Bibles, first, to the book of Isaiah. And we will look particularly at chapter 60 and the first five verses.

It is interesting that as we go through Ephesians, gain, to note the number of times and the frequency with which Paul draws upon the Old Testament and really the book of Isaiah in particular. So much so that Paul is often referred to as the New Testament Isaiah and Isaiah is referred to as the Old Testament Paul. There is such a great thematic connection between these two books of Scripture, these two prophecies and words of God to his people.

So Isaiah chapter 60. And, again, I will read for you the first five verses of this chapter and then we will go our primary text this morning.

Isaiah 60 verses one through five. Hear now the Word of the living God.

Arise, shine; For your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, And deep darkness the people; But the LORD will arise over you, And His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising. Lift up your eyes all around, and see: They all gather together, they come to you; Your sons shall come from afar, And your daughters shall be nursed at your side. Then you shall see and become radiant, And your heart shall swell with joy; Because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, The wealth of the Gentiles shall come to you.<sup>1</sup>

And now please turn over in your Bibles to the New Testament. Again, specifically the New Testament letter of Paul the apostle to the Ephesians, a predominantly Gentile group of converts living in various places in Asia Minor.

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 60:1-5.

Ephesians chapter five. Our particular focus this morning, really the window through which we will view the whole text will be verse 11. But I want to read for you the first 14 verses of Ephesians chapter five.

So, again, Ephesians 5:1-14. Hear the Word of God.

Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

Therefore do not be partakers with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. Therefore He says: "Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light."<sup>2</sup>

Let's pray now and ask for God's blessing on the proclamation of his Word. Let's pray.

*Our Father, we come before you in prayer once again. We thank you for the Word that you have given to us, that which you have spoken clearly to us and preserved for us down through the centuries and even the millennia. Now, God, we confess to you that we need your Spirit's empowerment to hear your Word as it is proclaimed and so, Lord, we do pray now that you would bless us such that your Word would be proclaimed in truth, that it would be received by your people with faith and love, that any who do not know you this morning would come to know Jesus Christ as Lord and as Savior. We pray, our heavenly Father, that you would honor and glorify yourself in our midst as your Word is proclaimed and heard. Thank you, again, Lord, for this time. Please cause us to worship you now through the hearing and the preaching of your Word. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.*

Well, we find ourselves this morning four days into the new year and, as I did last week, I would like to begin by asking you a couple of questions, not the really heavy handed

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<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 5:1-14.

questions I asked you last week, but some that are a bit lighter, although somewhat serious.

Again, as I mentioned, we a couple of days, a few days into the new year. Have you made New Year's resolutions? And if so, are they still in tact? Or have they been broken already?

We laugh because there is a humorous element to that. It is the same old cycle every year. We commit to be new kinds of people, to adopt new habits, a new way of life and then sometimes 48 or even 72, if that, hours into our New Year's resolutions they come crashing down around us and we resort right back to the same habits we had the previous year, just a few days ago.

It is the same old cycle. And this cycle can be frustrating although there is an element of humor to it. But it becomes deadly serious when Christians are involved in the same cycle as it applies to besetting sin.

See if you can't identify with this description, with this situation.

You are involved in a particular sin. Your heart grieves over it. You vow never to be a part of it again. And yet sometimes within hours those vows come crashing down around you. You have said, "Never again," and yet never turns out to be not a very long time at all. You are defeated, you are discouraged and, worse of all, perhaps it leads you to become apathetic and even to excuse sin on that basis with the idea, well, this is just who I am until the Lord returns. I am just going to have to cope with it and deal with it and manage it as best I can.

How, as God's people, is this pattern, this all too familiar pattern broken?

Well, in our passage this morning, the apostle Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit gives us certain commands or we could say certain mandates befitting the people of God. And along with these mandates comes the means of successful obedience to them. In short, God's people are to affirm who their Lord is, to believe what he says and then to watch as the obedience flows from that faith.

As you know, true faith always results in obedience to God's commands. And this morning we will explore the particular content of faith that our passage supplies to us and the obedience, then, which follows, necessarily, upon believing it.

In this way we will pick up where we left off last week dealing with the practical issues and the how tos or dealing with besetting sin.

We will be drawing from last week's text and also we will be pushing ahead to verse 14 of chapter five, but as I mentioned earlier, our primary focus, the window through which we will view the whole passage will be verse 11. So please turn with me again to Ephesians 5:11. I direct your attention there.

“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.”<sup>3</sup>

We will focus, first, on the negative side of what Paul says here.

“Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.”<sup>4</sup>

As we saw last week, the apostle here is not calling these Ephesian Christians to a kind of retreat mentality where they cloister themselves away from the world. He says, “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness and therefore run away from the world. Gather around in your Christian huddles and stay there.”

That is not what the apostle, what our Lord ultimately calls Christians to do. Remember, again, as we saw last week, we, as Christians, are to remain in the world. But the world is not to remain in us. We stay put until our Lord returns, but the affections of our heart must change and must look less and less like the world that surrounds us.

And so, again, the practical question arises, well, how do we do this? How does this actually work in a culture that is so saturated by sin and particularly what is Paul’s focus here, sexual sin? How in a culture obsessed with that kind of sin do we, as Christians, come away from it when we feel surrounded by it? How can we live holy lives in an unholy culture?

Well, again, we started to look toward an answer last week and we looked particularly at the idea of contentment. Paul mentions that in verse four of Ephesians five.

“Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.”<sup>5</sup>

We are to thank our God for what we have. We are to thank our God for who we have, the fact that Christ has been given for us. And the more we delight in that fact, the less we covet the things of the world. Specifically, the more we are in loving awe of Christ and the sacrifice that he made of us, the less we will want to participate in those deeds which led to that sacrifice, that sin which occasioned our Savior’s death upon the cross.

That is where we start. But now this morning we move on. We need to recognize that in addition to being thankful for what Christ has done for us, we are to recognize the results of that work. And for that we turn to verse eight, recognizing the results of Christ’s work.

Notice, again, verse eight.

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<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 5:11.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ephesians 5:4.

“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.”<sup>6</sup>

Brothers and sisters, if you know Jesus Christ this morning, if you are trusting in him for your salvation, God has made you a new creature as Paul says elsewhere. He has made you new. You are different people. You have not simply been called to adopt a new way of life, but you have been given a new kind of life. It is not the New Year’s resolution mentality all over again. You are not the same old people with a new moral code to live by. Rather, you have been freed from the condemnation of that moral code, of the law of God. You have been freed from your failure to obey it. Christ has taken that penalty upon himself and you have been fundamentally transformed so that obedience is now actually possible where formerly it was not.

Nor is what Paul says the kind of 12 step program methodology at work here among Christians. If you are familiar with those very well intentioned programs that help people over besetting addictions and the like, if you are familiar with those you know that in those kinds of attempts—again, very well intentioned attempts to modify behavior—people are told that they cannot change by themselves. They are told that they need help from a higher power. So far, so good.

But they are never given any specific details as to who that higher power is, what he is like, what he commands or what he has done. Rather, it is left up to the person. Whatever they believe in, whatever they think is out there, that becomes their source of strength.

And so, in reality, tapping into the strength of that other power out there is only an indirect way of relying upon our own strength. And, thus, the relapse and, thus, the failures and, thus, also the refrain within those circles.

“Once an addict, always an addict.”

And life is viewed in terms of coping with the besetting addiction rather than conquering it.

Well, brothers and sisters, God forbid that the sons and daughters of the true and living God would have such a defeatist attitude with regard to sin. We serve a risen Savior. Jesus Christ is not some vaguely defined force out there. And he is not the projection of our own thoughts of what God ought to be according to our own personal desires. He is the living Christ. He is the King of kings.

Now Paul used that phrase, “The kingdom of Christ,” back in verse five. And let’s think for a moment. How did Christ earn that kingdom?

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<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 5:8.

Well, he came into the world. He lived a sinless life fully obedient to the law of God, as I mentioned. He took upon himself the penalty for our disobedience of that law. He was crucified. He was buried and then he was raised to life again on the third day.

As Paul wrote toward the end of Ephesians one, Christ ascended following the resurrection, he ascended to the right hand of God the Father where he reigns now over all things. He is King and all things have been put under his feet.

And, people of God, this most fundamental, basic conviction about the Christian faith must penetrate and animate your hearts this morning. Your Savior, the risen Christ reigns over all things.

So rather than feeling overwhelmed at the presence of sin in this world and perhaps in your heart this morning, you must gain an increasingly overwhelming conviction of the fact that Christ is Lord, that he reigns over all things.

Again, think of it. Jesus Christ defeated death. How often we say that, but how poorly we grasp it and how seldom we apply it. If Jesus Christ defeated sin and death and hell and rose triumphantly over them, then nothing in this world and no sin within our hearts is more powerful than he. We must stop thinking of ourselves as hapless victims tossed about on a turbulent sea of sin just trying to stay afloat. No, as Paul writes elsewhere, “We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.”<sup>7</sup>

And as he writes here, “We were,” past tense, “We were darkness, but now we are,” present tense, “light in the Lord, in the risen Lord, our King.”

Believe that. Affirm that Christ is King and then affirm what he says about you as his subjects. You are life in the Lord. And, as a result, you have been given a new set of affections, a new set of priorities, a new kind of life that you are to exercise and act upon. And the description is found in verse nine.

Look at Ephesians five verse nine, please.

“For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth.”<sup>8</sup>

Now the version that I am preaching from this morning is the New King James Version and those of you with different translations will immediately notice a difference. Instead of saying the fruit of the Spirit in the ESV or in other translations, you will see the fruit of the light. And that is a better translation. That is a better use of the context here.

Many reliable ancient Greek manuscripts, in fact, some of the most important ones we have, have the word “light” and not the word “spirit.” And that word “light” fits better with this context. Think of it. Notice the parallel from verse 11.

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<sup>7</sup> Romans 8:37.

<sup>8</sup> Ephesians 5:9.

“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.”<sup>9</sup>

Well, trace that back now to verse nine and see how much more it makes sense.

“For the fruit of the [light] is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth.”<sup>10</sup>

Throughout this passage we have the constant contrast between light and darkness and while it is certainly true that the Spirit is the one who produces those qualities mentioned in verse nine, the word “light,” again, is in some of the best manuscripts we have and, most importantly, it better fits the context that is obviously before us.

And so as a believer who has been made light in the Lord, you desire what Paul mentions here: goodness, righteousness and truth. You desire that your life would reflect these qualities, increasingly. And your heart breaks that at times it does not.

As Paul writes in Romans seven, he delights in the law of God in his inner man. And you understand that if you are a Christian. In that chapter, though, Paul also describes something else you understand if you are a Christian and that is the war that you feel within yourself, the desires of your old nature tugging against that which is true of you now that you have come to Christ, your new standards, your new desires.

And, remember, this is not just the vague struggle to overcome bad habit. It is the deep crying of the soul to be conformed fully to the holy standards of the true and living God. If that describes you, if you know that struggle, then rejoice, because that battle does not take place in those who are dominated by darkness, those who, in Paul’s words here, are darkness.

No, child of God, you are light in the Lord and you are called and equipped by God to live a life of increasing goodness and righteousness and truth.

But, again, we, have the question: how? That sounds great in theory, but how does it happen in practice?

Well, first of all, again, we affirm who Christ is. He is Lord. And if we are honest with ourselves, so much of our struggle with sin comes down to that basic issue. Christ is Lord. And in those moments of disobedience we deny that lordship. But if we are committed to the fact that he is Lord, we will pursue that which he commands us to do. So much of our struggle has to do with simply not affirming what we affirm in general and that is Christ’s lordship.

But moving beyond that, if we affirm that Christ is Lord, then we also must agree with and believe what he says. Trust what he calls us to trust.

Notice what we are to do in verse 10.

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<sup>9</sup> Ephesians 5:11.

<sup>10</sup> Ephesians 5:9.

“Finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.”<sup>11</sup>

Seeking what pleases our God, finding out what pleases him and then doing those things. It sounds simple and it is and yet we often find ourselves in a contrary posture. Find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Search his Word. Hear it preached. Pursue those things which Christ says are good and righteous and true.

And here is the result of that practically. As you take those simple small steps of obedience, you will find that your old sinful affections will slink back to the grave where they belong.

Now, yes, this will be an ever present battle in this life. We will never be fully free from sin until we arrive in the face of our Lord, seeing him face to face in heaven. And yet there is to be increasing victory over sin in our lives. And those old desires fade as we seek what pleases the Lord and as obedience flows from it.

Think of it as helpful in these terms. Around this time of year one of the major resolutions people make, if not the most popular resolution they make is to do what? To diet, to lose weight, because for the past few weeks especially, they have been consuming more, much more than their body requires of every kind of food they can get their hands on.

Now, at first, we may not want to diet, because we love what we have been eating despite what it does to our body and the strange shapes it puts our body in. But as we exercise, our appetite begins to change. We start wanting the healthy stuff.

Think of it. After a work out, you don't want to devour a box of Twinkies. Now, while you may have stuffed your face with them the previous week, now after you are off the treadmill you want nothing to do with them. The thought is sickening and those old cravings start to fade away.

And, again, that is why some people don't want to diet. They don't want to lose their appetite for the junk and their bodies suffer the consequences.

Well, that is similar to the Christian life. When we feel immersed in sin, overwhelmed by it, it is often because that is exactly how we want it. We don't want to give up those old cravings. We don't want to take those disciplined steps of obedience because we don't want to lose our appetites for that which gratifies us in the moment, but which kills us in the long run.

Brothers and sisters, though you may feel suffocated by the desires of the old nature, again, you must realize and believe and act upon the fact that you have a new nature, a more fundamental nature now.

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<sup>11</sup> Ephesians 5:10.



Notice Paul is always referring to the Ephesians as saints. He doesn't say, "Hey, bunch of sinners saved by grace," although that is what they are, but he says, more fundamentally, "Saints." That is fundamentally who we are. We have been set aside by the Lord. We have a new identity. Those old cravings and that which you did or even perhaps are doing in order to feed those cravings, you know better. As we focused on last week, you know the true nature of those sins. You have been told by your Lord. You have been warned by him. Not only have you been made to see the light, but you have been made light. Obey, then, people of God, your Lord. Trust him when he says that these sinful works are unfruitful. They amount to nothing but misery and death that they have called forth from him his holy wrath. Take those steps of obedience that we saw last week and what we see this week. Find what pleases the Lord and do it even if you don't feel like it. In fact, especially if you don't feel like it.

God has equipped you with the grace to do it.

And, again, as you obey, your affections will align themselves behind and in support of your obedience.

You will stop craving the junk and you see that which contributes to your spiritual health and strength. And you will speak it and you will love it.

So, again, seek what pleases the Lord. And in doing so, you will have less and less fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.

Again, verse 11.

"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness."<sup>12</sup>

So on the one hand we pursue what pleases the Lord. And on the other hand we stay away from that which is unfruitful, that which he describes as darkness. In other words, in very practical terms, don't set yourselves up for a fall.

Again, people of God, you this morning, you may be struggling with a particular sin this morning. We may come here feeling overwhelmed, dominated by that particular sin, despairing of our ever being free of it. Well, let us take an honest look at our life's habits. Have you been setting yourself up for a fall? Have you been feeding your lusts, again, in a particular context in which Paul deals with here?

If so, then it is no wonder you feel overwhelmed.

Think of it in terms of a fire. Those old habits and desires. They may feel like an inferno inside of you unable to be controlled. But what is the most effective way of stopping a fire? Not spraying it with a hose, it is cutting of its air supply. If a fire starts in an oven,

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<sup>12</sup> Ephesians 5:11.

you don't open the door to try to put it out. You keep the over closed. You cut off its supply of oxygen and it will die its own death.

If you are struggling with a particular sin, don't give your sinful desires a vent, a way to breath and to become more and more an inferno. Let it die for lack of air.

Specifically, again, in regard to sexual sin which is Paul's concern here, if you struggle, for instance, with internet use, there are Christian based software program you can purchase so that others can keep you accountable in regard to the sites you visit. Keep the computer in a public place. It may be necessary for you to eliminate your internet use all together for a time. And that is well worth it.

In your thoughts when you are beset by temptation, pray. Paul gives us a list in Philippians four and he says, "Think on these things, whatever is good and true and noble and right," similar to what he mentions here in Ephesians five.

And along those lines, in terms of a very practical recommendation, there are good books on the subject. Most of the good book are the old books. And let me just—if it is appropriate—recommend to you a book by Thomas Brooks. It is called *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices* and it is a wonderful, biblical exposition of this exact issue of conquering those sins. *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*.

When you are in public, remember the vow that Job made. He would not look upon a maiden. In other words, let's keep our eyes to ourselves and from wandering and lingering. If the problem is TV or movies, don't watch them when you are alone. Remove yourself from those questionable kinds of movies. Be willing, brothers and sisters, with things like TV that are in and of themselves fine and they are legitimate, but if they are occasions for you of evil, be willing to part from them.

Think again of, as I mentioned last week, Joseph in ancient Egypt who parted with his coat, his outer garment when Potiphar's wife made advances at him. He literally fled sexual immorality even though it was embarrassing to do so. Even though he didn't have to run away so much that his coat was left in her hands, he did it. He fled.

Listen to God's recounting of that event in Genesis 39, Joseph's response to the advances of this immoral woman.

How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her or to be with her. But it happened about this time, when Joseph went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house was inside, that she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Genesis 39:9-12.

Note the pattern. Joseph affirmed God's authority. "How can I do this great wickedness in the sight of my God?" Joseph believed God's Word that what Potiphar's wife was suggesting was, in fact, wicked. And then he did what was necessary to flee the situation that could have led to the sin.

Now after Joseph obeyed the Lord in this way, everything went happily ever after, right? No. Of course not. Things got a lot worse for Joseph.

If you remember the rest of the narrative, life became miserable for him. Potiphar's wife accused him of attempted rape. He was unjustly accused of an awful crime and thrown into prison for it only to suffer one heart crushing set back after another.

Why? Well, think of what he had done. He had fled from sin. He obeyed the Lord. And in doing so he revealed Potiphar's wife to be what she was, an adulterer. And she would have none of it. So she lied and had an innocent man thrown into prison for her sin, her fault.

Brothers and sisters, when God's people obey him in the midst of a culture in rebellion against him, it will be noticed and it will be despised. Because as the Church pursues holiness, an unholy world is revealed for what it is. And it will not tolerate being revealed as such.

But, people of God, this is exactly the duty to which we are called, that revealing obedience.

Notice, again, with me, please, verse 11.

"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them."<sup>14</sup>

Expose them. Now that word translated "expose" could also be translated—and perhaps it is in some of your translations—rebuke. And this time there is not two different words. It is just different connotations. The two concepts go hand in hand.

As Christians live out their calling, the unfruitful works of darkness are revealed for what they really are. It is an implicit and sometimes explicit rebuke to the world when the Church heeds her Lord's call to holiness.

Matthew Henry writes that Christians are to, quote, "Reprove their sins by abounding in the contrary duties." Reprove the sins of the world by abounding in the contrary duties.

And, notice. We are not called here to a self righteous, arrogant finger pointing at other people, especially when we privately succumb to the same sins ourselves. We are called very simply to active obedience to our Lord's command. And that active obedience will

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<sup>14</sup> Ephesians 5:11.

have the effect of shining a massive spotlight upon the darkness and exposing it for what it is. And that is what Paul means by verse 13.

Look at verse 13 of Ephesians five.

“But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light.”<sup>15</sup>

Again, grammatical issues are there, but the best rendering is essentially expressing the fact that light reveals darkness. That is what it is for. Light exposes and chases away darkness.

One commentator refers to it as, “The proper business of light is to expose the darkness.”

And so as a church we should not be on a constant quest to find fault with others. Rather, we must be on a constant quest to obey our Lord. And as we pursue that obedience, there will be natural consequences.

Never was the old saying truer than in this context. No good deed goes unpunished.

It is only natural. A world that hated and crucified Christ will not tolerate it when the Church which proclaims Christ in Word and deed becomes more like him.

Our Lord said to his disciples, “If they hated me, they will hate you.”

Now as an application let’s come to the service a bit and look at current events in the life of the broad Church, all different denominations in this country and different things going on within our culture, because the truths expressed in this passage really ought to make us wonder why if there is such a hostility when God’s people obey his commands, if there is such a hostility from the world, then that ought to make us wonder why an increasingly godless nation would look with approval upon leaders within the Church.

The situation coming up not long from now in which one of the most popular evangelical pastors in the nation is slated to give the invocation at the inauguration of a new president. Now this is being described as this new president’s extending an olive branch to evangelicals. And, indeed, some of his supporters are furious about that olive branch. And so, perhaps, something is going right.

But the policies of this new administration are, if they come to be what they are promised to be, some of the most godless policies. Regardless of your political affiliation, this is the objective evaluation in light of God’s Word. What has been promised in the next few years are some of the most godless policies and actions that this nation has ever seen, particularly in the area of abortion. This new administration has promised to undo decades worth of work by Christians and other pro-lifers in general. And so, again, we

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<sup>15</sup> Ephesians 5:13.

have to wonder. Is the extending of this olive branch just done with one hand while a knife waits in the other to strike?

I don't mean to give a definitive answer to that, but it will be very interesting to hear that prayer, that inaugural prayer, that invocation at the inauguration. And we ought to pray in advance for our brother as he goes to that prayer and as he thinks about it even now as the world turns its attention upon him.

But in keeping with the theme of our text, imagine for a moment that inauguration day comes and the prayer is a truly God honoring prayer, appropriate to our national circumstances as God views them. Imagine what would happen if the pastor went to the global spotlight with the prayer of, let's say, Daniel or Ezra or any number of prayers of repentance found within Scripture uttered at significant times in the history of God's people often when they found themselves in a land that stood in opposition to God.

What if he asked God to prevent our new leaders from their stated goal, as I mentioned, of repealing virtually every restriction on killing unborn children? What if he asked God to judge those leaders from every party who are seeking to change the definition of marriage? What if, most essentially of all, he asked that the nation would be dropped to its knees in confession of sin and in confession that Jesus Christ alone is King of kings and Lord of lords? How would that kind of prayer go over?

Not well to say the least. Why? Darkness hates light. Jesus spoke of it in John three.

“This is the judgment. Light is come into the world, but men loved darkness rather than light. They will not go to the light lest their deeds be exposed and they be reproved.”

So, brothers and sisters, in whatever context we find ourselves, whether the intense spotlight of global stage or in the proportionally intense pressure of hard conversations with unbelieving loved ones, or believing brothers and sisters who are willingly caught up in sin, the intense pressure of leaving circumstances that lead to sin, whatever our circumstances, we are called to shine the light of Jesus Christ into those circumstances. We are not allowed to keep quiet about our faith, to hide it for fear of whatever consequences we dread.

Perhaps for you it is fear of losing a relationship that keeps you mute about your faith, about your Lord. Perhaps you have placed yourself in compromising situations because you fear what would happen to your relationship to that person if you removed yourself from those circumstances. If you refused to go with them in those circumstances you would be labeled as judgmental. The relationship could be broken. You fear. You fear, rather, that you would lose your opportunity even to evangelize that unbeliever or to call that believer living in sin to repentance.

But, friend, Christian, being in those circumstances, think of it. Are you evangelizing the unbeliever there or is the opposite happening? Is he winning you over? How is it that he

is quite open about his rebellion, but you are quite silent about your Lord, the one against whom he rebels?

Being in that person's company in compromising situations, setting yourself up for a fall and then feeling torn in your soul between that old life and your new life in Christ is not helping that person and it is definitely hurting you.

On the other hand, your departure not from loving this person, not from praying for this person, but your departure or your speaking up and refusing to go along with or approve this person's rebellion will be a loud and clear witness to him of the danger in which he exists every moment, the judgment that hangs over his head. It will be a loud and clear signal that you love your Lord. And despite what he may think of you, you love him as well.

Sometimes it is a matter of speaking up and having tough conversations with those whom we love who are entangled in the deeds of darkness.

William Hendrickson writes this. "One is not being nice to a wicked man by endeavoring to make him feel what a fine fellow he is. The cancerous tumor must be removed, not humored. It is not really an act of love to smooth things over as if the terrible evil committed by those in darkness is not so bad after all," end quote.

Now when we have those hard conversations, brothers and sisters, we must, of course, speak with the gentleness and the humility to which Paul calls us in chapter four. But we must not let the practitioner of darkness continue to wander down that path of destruction by our passivity, but not warning him of the seriousness of his plight either through words or through our absence.

And, if we fear losing their friendships or good relationships with them, we have to question the basis of those friendships. Upon what is that friendship built? Is true friendship the constant approval of each other's behavior? Its unconditional love does not mean unconditional acceptance of behavior. Usually it means the opposite. And the person offended by a biblical application of biblical truth is showing himself not to be a true friend, whereas you, despite the ill treatment you may receive, are showing yourself a servant of Christ and a true friend of that person.

Young people, even when your best friends, the ones you love to hang around the most, the one in whose eyes you look for approval and acceptance, when they want you to do wrong, you must not do it. You must serve Christ. If you love him and if you love your friend, you will not go along with what they want you to do. You will not be mean about it. You are not supposed to be arrogant about it, but express to them, "I can't do that. I love Christ and I love you. You are my friend and I won't be part of that kind of sin." Encourage them not to be either.

For all of us, people of God, don't be complicit in the continued rebellion of an unbeliever or an unrepentant Christian. Speak up. Get out. Whatever is necessary to tell your friend and your loved one, again, "I love my Lord and I love you."

Hear the words of our Lord from Matthew five as he addresses his Church.

You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.<sup>16</sup>

Think, again, as we wind our way to a conclusion, think, again, of the story of Joseph, how God used that man's plight to rescue his people from a terrible famine. Think of that but be very careful. What was the point of the story of Joseph? That if you are just obedient and patient long enough that everything will turn out ok and people will apologize for how they have treated you? Not at all. That is not the point of the story of Joseph.

Think of people like Jeremiah, the weeping prophet whose entire ministry was spent prophesying and seeing the destruction of his people and being horribly persecuted himself. No, the point of the story of Joseph is that God is faithful to his people. There are no guarantees, brothers and sisters, of a happy ending. In whatever situation we are dealing with, in whatever situation we feel conflicted, there are no guarantees in this life that God gives us of a happy ending in this life. What is promised, however, this is no mere perfunctory comfort. What is promised to us is that God is faithful.

That is what Paul proclaims here in verse 14. God is faithful to equip us to do that which he calls us to do and to guide us and to be with us as we do it.

Verse 14.

"Therefore He says: 'Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light.'"<sup>17</sup>

As we read earlier, Paul draws from this theme and even these particular words from Isaiah 60 among other places in Isaiah. Listen, again, just briefly to a refresher from Isaiah 60.

Arise, shine; For your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, And deep darkness the people; But the LORD will arise over you, And His glory

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<sup>16</sup> Matthew 5:14-16.

<sup>17</sup> Ephesians 5:14.

will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising.<sup>18</sup>

Note the connections. Isaiah proclaimed a word of encouragement to God's people in the midst of captivity in a foreign land. Paul proclaimed encouragement to God's people in the midst of a culture that hated God. The call in both cases is to arise, to heed the life giving call of Christ, to take a step back and to realize what God is doing and the fact that his glory is shining upon the Church as she obeys his call.

Isaiah proclaimed that darkness would cover the earth, but that the Lord, Yahweh, would arise over his people, his glory would be seen upon them. And what does Paul say in our passage? What has he said? The world is in darkness, but the Church is light in the Lord. And Paul fills in the name Christ where Isaiah used the term "Lord, Yahweh."

Again, Jesus Christ is our Savior. He is Lord. He is King. And the light of Christ ever shines upon the people of Christ when we awake, when we go about the duty to which he has called us.

So then, rather than despairing of the darkness of the world, rejoice in what Christ is doing in the world. The Church is being built. The Gentiles are coming in. You are living proof of it. You have heard the Word of God. The light has shined upon you. It has exposed the darkness in our hearts, subdued us to itself and God has redeemed us. The Gentiles have come in.

Rather than despairing of the thought of difficult conversations with those who are in darkness, rejoice that you have been given the privilege and duty of having those conversations, of holding forth the standards of your king, of shining his glorious light into the darkness which cannot stand it because the darkness cannot defeat it.

And, again, Christian, you know that personally. After all, Christ exposed the darkness in our hearts. And he did so as a means of bringing us to himself.

Now, again, we are not guaranteed particular results and resolutions to difficult circumstances. We dare not be presumptuous, but, people of God, we dare not be discouraged.

You, Paul says, the Lord says, "You, the people of God, were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk, then, as children of light. Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them."

This morning, affirm anew in your hearts that Christ is Lord. Believe what he says and you will see the obedience flowing from your life of faith. Walk and live as people called out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Let's pray.

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<sup>18</sup> Isaiah 60:1-3.