

Living as Lights in the World

Ephesians 5:8

I began this speech by commending the young adults who attended the retreat for their exemplary behavior, for their ability to get along with each other, and especially for their love for the Word of God. I told them that they had shown themselves to be what Ephesians 5:8 talked about: “light in the Lord.”

The description of believers as “light in the Lord” is an amazing description. It’s a description only used of God himself and of our Lord Jesus Christ and of believers. God is light, and in him is no darkness at all, and Jesus is the light of the world, but believers are also light. That is incredible!

In his speech Pastor Kleyn compared believers to a fluorescent light bulb, a very beautiful illustration, but this description goes beyond that. A light bulb, no matter how brightly it shines, cannot be called “light.” It only holds the light, but believers *are* light, light in the Lord.

They are light because they are children of light. That’s another amazing statement. If believers are light, then the light is their father. Just as we have our personal characteristics from our parents, so spiritually we are light because the light fathered us.

That is where we must begin when we talk about our calling to be lights in the world. The word of God does not start by saying, “Do this: walk as children of light.” It starts by telling us who we are and what we are. We must know that it is our calling to walk as children of light, but there is no help and encouragement in that. To be told only what we must do is only discouraging.

The help and encouragement come from knowing and remembering what we are. As light in the Lord we *can* walk as children of light. As light in the Lord we *may* walk as children of light. As light in the Lord it is our privilege to walk as children of light. As light in the Lord we *will* walk as children of light.

Notice, too, that we are light *in the Lord*. Only in connection with him, our Lord Jesus, are we light, and faith is our connection with him. By faith we are so closely joined to him that we become light, and having become light, we walk as children of light.

Chapters 4–6 of Ephesians tell us what it means to walk as children of light in the church,

in marriage, in the family, in our work, among unbelievers, but we do that because of what we are in Him.

Parents sometimes say something like Ephesians 5:8 to their children, perhaps when they send them off to something like a Young Adult's Retreat. They say, "Remember who you are. Remember that you are part of our family. Remember that you are part of our church. Remember that you are a Christian. Let that determine your behavior." If we love our parents and their words mean anything to us, then our behavior is ruled by what we are as covenant young people and as church members. The word of God does that here, only takes it to a much higher level, when it says, "Walk as children of light."

The warnings that follow are there for a reason. We sometimes hide our light. We don't always walk as children of light. We don't always understand what it means to live as children of light. But if we really understood, really knew and believed, really kept in the mind and were conscious of what God has made us in Christ, we wouldn't need those warnings. It would be enough for us to be told what we are in him.

Because of our weakness and sinfulness, however, we do need those warning, as well as the reminder of what we are by grace, and the number of warnings is striking. We should not ignore them. In fact, we would do well to write them down and post them like a sign wherever there's the danger that instead of walking as children of light, we slip and fall. We could tape a copy to the dashboard of the car and put another copy in our phones with a reminder that pops up regularly. We must walk as children of light, but we must be careful where we walk, and with whom.

Notice the very first warning in verse 3: "But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints." What could be more appropriate for the times in which we live and with all the temptations to which we are exposed on television, on the internet and in an increasingly permissive society. The warning was necessary when Paul wrote the book of Ephesians, and it is a hundred times more important today.

Our world is a world that "blesses the covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth." The stock market, the lottery, the availability of credit, the media, all fuel a covetousness that is destroying our society and the lives of our fellow citizens and that often wreaks havoc in the lives of God's people. It's covetousness that leaves us no time for church and for spiritual things, even for

family. It's covetousness that very often takes mothers out of the home and away from their children. It's covetousness that keeps us deeply in debt, though the word of God says, "Owe no man anything, but to love one another." Read that first warning again.

Verses 11 and 12 take the warning a step farther: "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret." Think of all those things, so readily available today, that are described by the word of God as too shameful to speak of, and you will see the need for these warnings.

Verse 11 is especially significant. Though written two thousand years ago and in a society that was quite different from ours, Paul writes as though he had just walked into the room while the television set was on, or as though he was sitting in front of a computer and checking on what some member of the church had been looking at or listening to.

He doesn't only warn against looking and listening, but against letting those things become our friends because we are constantly in "fellowship" with them. We are warned against allowing ourselves to become addicted to these things, to filth and pornography, to adultery and fornication, to covetousness and greed through constant exposure to them.

We should think of the whole entertainment industry when we read these words and ask whether we are making the unfruitful works of darkness our friends. Think of sports or the music to which we listen. At its best it is "unfruitful," to say nothing of the works of darkness, but the question raised by God's word does not just concern the fruitfulness of those things, but whether those are things that are worth all the time, that take almost all of our attention, that capture our interest, that are our friends and fellows.

Then comes verse 6: "Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience." Don't ever think that the unfruitful works of darkness, especially uncleanness and covetousness, are harmless—that we can play around with them and dabble in them and not do so to our own spiritual disadvantage and hurt. People go to hell as a result of these things; that's what the word of God means.

Our calling to walk as children of light does not just mean that we heed the warning signs that are posted by God himself. Our calling is wonderful and beautiful. Verse 8 is positive and encouraging and the similar passage, Matthew 5:14–16, is the same: "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a

bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

That believers are the light of the world does not mean that they are called to make this world a little less dark or that they are called to try and change the world for good. It means that in all the world they are the only light there is. There is no other light anywhere. Think of that: Now that Jesus has gone away, you are the only light there is in world.

Notice, too, that walking as children of light means we do good works. It’s as simple as that. Walking as children of light means that we do our daily business and do it in obedience to the word of God—to the best of our ability and out of love for Jesus, our Savior.

Good works are not something only a few people can do or have opportunity to do. We do not have to be ministers or Christian school teachers to do good works. A mother who does her work faithfully in the home is doing some of the best works a Christian can do. A man who does his work cheerfully and honestly, whatever his work may be, is doing good works of which God himself approves and walking as a child of the light..

Doing good works means that we are the best we can be as fathers, mothers, laborers, husbands, wives, unmarried persons, widows, widowers, sons, daughters, young people, old people, teachers, students, elders, pastors, deacons, members of the church—and all for God’s sake and for our Savior’s sake. Then we are not only walking as children of light, but our light shines before men, and even those who do not believe can see who our Father is.

That isn’t easy. Walking as children of light means that we lose friends, lose jobs, suffer ridicule and even persecution. We must be strong in the Lord (Eph. 6:10). We must be fully armored and ready for battle (Eph. 6:11–17). But walking as children of light we have the promise that we will see the rising of the Light in the last day and will walk in that kingdom that has no need of sun or moon or stars, where God himself is the light of his people forever.

My dear young people, remember what you are by grace. Remember what God has done for you in Christ: “Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord.”

“Walk as children of light.”

This an abbreviated version of a speech given at the Lynden Young Adults Retreat in July, 2012