

“Turn Off *Lust*. Turn on the *Light*”

Part 2: December 4, 2005



Ephesians 5:8-14

Last Sunday evening, we looked at Ephesians 5:3-7 which commands and equips believers to turn off lust. This week, we continue with the second part of this passage that calls us and shows us what it means to **turn on the light**. Let's read the next seven verses together from Ephesians 5:8-14:

8 For 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.”

Isn't this a great time of the year to be talking about *light*? After all we are moving into the winter season, a time where we see less and less of it. You get up when it's dark and many come home in the dark—and so we're all feeling a little more light deprived this time of year. Some even say that the incidence for depression is higher in winter time—in part due to the decrease of light. Perhaps that is one reason so many enjoy decorating their homes and businesses with lights at this time of year. It not only celebrates the holiday season—but it breaks up the gloom and monotony of the darkness.

Our generation is by no means the first to complain about the lack of light. Pagans not only noticed it in years gone by—but were troubled by it. And so when the Romans watched the trend toward darkness begin to turn the corner after the winter solstice in late December, they celebrated the triumph of the Sun god over darkness with feasts like Saturnalia. Without conscious awareness, Roman paganism intuitively recognized that winter with its darkness symbolized death while the gradual approach of spring with its ever increasing light symbolized life. But they wrongly worshiped the Creation rather than the Creator. They gave glory to the Sun god rather than the One whom Malachi called “the Sun of Righteousness” (Malachi 4:2) and whom John the Baptist's father (Zechariah) would later describe as “the rising sun” who would come from heaven “to shine on those living in darkness” (Luke 1:78-79). The major reason the Church began to celebrate Christ's birth in December (rather than in the spring when it likely occurred) was to make a statement to the pagans about Christ, the One who truly is the **Light of the world**.

For centuries the Jews have celebrated a holiday that overlaps the Christian celebration of Christ's birth. Do you know what that is? It's called Chanukah. What is that all about? Chanukah means "**Rededication**." And it refers to the cleansing and *rededication* of the Temple after a monstrous ruler named Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated the Temple by sacrificing a pig to Zeus on the brazen altar. That led to a revolt and a great victory by the Jews over the occupying and vastly superior armies of Antiochus. After the victory, they cleansed the Temple and rededicated it with an eight day celebration. But they had a big problem. According to tradition, only a one-day supply of non-desecrated olive oil could be found for the lampstand during this eight day celebration. According to Jewish tradition, that small quantity of oil managed to burn to for *eight* days. That is why Chanukah is also called the **Feast of Lights**. To this day, Jews commemorate this event by lighting candles for the eight nights of Chanukah. But do you realize *what* or should I say **whom** that lampstand represents? In John 8:12, Jesus used that lampstand along with three other candelabras that lit up the Temple area at night as a metaphor of His Person and work when he stood near the Temple and made this staggering claim: "**I am the Light of the world.**" And yet as they basked in the brilliant light of the candelabras, they were *blind* to **the Light—the Light of the world!** The Apostle John summarized their dilemma this way in John 1:4: "*The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.*"

Today is no different. Most people in our generation are just like the people of earlier times. Celebrating light—yet with little understanding of the One who is the Light. So many are fascinated by physical light—yet enveloped by moral and spiritual darkness. Paul said in II Corinthians 4:6 that it is only when the God who said: "*Let light shine out of darkness*" makes "*his light shine in our hearts*" that we have "*the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus.*" That is a good definition of a Christian. One who has had his eyes opened to see and embrace the Light of the world! If you have truly trusted Christ as Savior, you have not only *seen* the Light, you have *become light*.

Which brings us to where our text begins tonight. "**For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.**" Brothers and sisters, in the midst of all the moral confusion we talked about last week, God calls you and me to **turn on the light**. So *how* do we do that? *How* do we who are light in the Lord keep from being sucked into the moral darkness that permeates our culture and so much of our every day experience? How do avoid becoming angry and impatient when everybody else is jockeying for position in traffic or in line at some door-buster of a sale at Kohl's? How do you maintain pure thoughts and righteous conduct when impurity is the normal staple of a society that is fast moving toward absolute freedom of expression with no regard for the effects on others? Some try to isolate themselves from the darkness. That approach has two problems: **1)** It forgets that the source of darkness ultimately comes from within ourselves and tries to fight the battle for purity on an external level (socially or politically). That approach by itself won't win the battle for purity. At best it winds up replacing one kind of darkness for another. **2)** Secondly, in isolating us from the world in which we live, it causes us to neglect our mandate to *be light* in a dark world. Jesus raised that very point in Matthew 5:15 when He said: "*Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl.*" This passage gives us a *different* way. A better way. It does so by giving us *four characteristics* of the believer who is seeking to live *as light in a dark world*.

II. Turn on the Light “*Live as children of Light*” (vs. 8-14)

The first thing that light does is...

A. Light *shines* (9) (*for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth*)...*Light* causes growth resulting in *godly fruit*. Darkness, on the other hand, produces no fruit. (Notice the “fruitless works of darkness” in verse 11). Light in this passage first of all describes the character of God. “*God is Light; in Him there is no darkness at all*” (I John 1:5). Living as children of light means taking on the character of Jesus Christ and reflecting that character before a watching world. Paul uses three words to describe what that looks like in everyday life. Your light is shining when you are growing in...

1. Goodness—The word for “good” means that which is *fitting or satisfactory* for one’s purpose. Goodness means becoming what a human was originally created to be. To perfectly love God and one’s neighbor. So goodness is simply becoming what it means to be truly human—before sin came along and distorted God’s image in us. (Beware of the phrase—“I’m *only human!*”)

You may be wondering what that looks like since we have never seen such a thing in a sin-cursed world. Look no further than Jesus—for He is the epitome of true humanity. He is *the* standard of goodness. Luke describes His life on earth as a *mission of goodness*. In Acts 10:38 he talks about... “...*how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good....*” Jesus whole life—his character, his actions, and his words—all of that is a record and reminder of what it means to *do good*.

In our effort to emphasize the fact that we are saved by grace alone through faith in Christ alone, we sometimes make the error of thinking that good works are not important. Yet they were not only essential in Jesus’ mission to earn for us a goodness that we could not attain, they also are a pattern for us to follow. Paul himself said that while we are not saved *by* good works—we are most assuredly saved *unto* good works (Ephesians 2:8-10). We cannot lose sight of that.

What did Jesus, the Light of the world tell His disciples in Matthew 5:16? “*In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*”

So what does that look like on Tuesday? It is less spectacular than you think. Just listen to the ordinariness of the good works that Paul describes for widows who were eligible for church assistance:

1 Timothy 5:9-10

9 No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband, 10 and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds.

Do you get the picture of what goodness looks like? What does it look like *at home*? It's washing dishes and changing diapers and taking out the trash. It's making meals and helping with cleaning and doing projects around the house when you would rather just "veg" out in front of the TV after a long day. It is looking beyond the needs of your own home and preparing meals for the sick and visiting shut-ins or providing hospitality.

Goodness is not about the *spectacular*. It's more about everyday-serving-the needs-of-others-kind-of-stuff. What might that kind of goodness look like where *you* work? It would not only mean doing an honest day's work—it would mean doing it with genuine desire to benefit the needs of people for whom you work—rather than working simply to pick up a paycheck.

Sometimes goodness demands more than the mundane. Sometimes it requires a long look at a Savior who suffered so much for us—yet never stopped doing good—even to his persecutors. Goodness is never more godlike than when it is deployed in patiently overcoming the evil of someone who is persistently unkind to you. You want to know the definition of a hero? A hero is somebody who is willing to die to his own agenda so He can live out Christ's agenda—and in the process be an instrument of light and life to a person in darkness. I saw that happen this week at Cornerstone. Or should I say: I saw the effects of what took place over three years come to fruition in a sister who finally saw Christ's Light in the good works of her husband. Wow! There is a fruit called the passion fruit. For the believer, our "passion fruit" ought to be goodness! God give me a heart of goodness that more and more resembles the heart of your dear Son! The fruit of light is goodness. But that's not all. The fruit of the light is also...

2. Righteousness—This word means conformity to God's standard. It is a life that takes God's will seriously. Practically speaking, it is pretty close in meaning to goodness. Goodness is the practical

outworking of a life that is committed to God's ways or to righteousness. Goodness grows on the branches of righteousness. But righteousness grows out of something even deeper. Righteousness grows out of the...

3. Truth—This truth is not just truth in some abstract sense. But according to Ephesians 4:21 it is “*in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.*” All the truths that Jesus taught and all that He modeled of what He taught. All the truths of Scripture that point to Him and direct us to Him as our Savior, our Lord, and our ultimate Joy. The fruit of Light is rooted in the soil of the truth that is in Jesus. The implication is pretty plain. If we want to bear that sort of fruit—then we need no less to be grounded in the truth ourselves. I hope you will consider that as you set goals for the New Year.

In short, light *shines*. It shines in the form of good deeds that grow out of a life committed to God's ways and rooted in the soil of the truth that is in Christ Jesus. But what is it that makes a life really shine. The next verse explains that where it tells us that...

- B. Light *clarifies* (10) “...and *find out what pleases the Lord...*” Light is not “fuzzy” or relativistic. A person who is really serious about cooperating with God's Spirit in producing the fruit of Light actively searches out what God wants. The word here that is translated in the NIV as “find out” literally means to “put to the test.” It was used to describe the process where a metallurgist would assay or test a supposedly precious metal to see if it was genuine gold or silver. Here it is used metaphorically to explain how a believer makes godly choices. He tests an idea to make sure it is pleasing to God. How does he test it? What is the measuring stick of whether or not it pleases God? God's Word. It must be in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus (Eph. 4:21).

Practically what does that mean? It means being a **Biblical Decision-Maker**. It means being deliberate about your choices—and testing them not merely according to the standards of your peers, the way you were raised, and certainly not according to prevailing public opinion. It doesn't mean testing them according to the standards of Christian leaders—though God intends that to be helpful according to Hebrews 13:7. Ultimately, it means testing your decisions according to what God's Word *actually says!*

Now that idea may appear to be profoundly obvious. But it frankly eludes many who call themselves Christians. One of the things that is so striking about the Gallup polls and more recently what we are hearing from the polls taken by George Barna is how increasingly common it is for professing Christians to think and act in conformity to prevailing community standards.

Ephesians 5:10 is a call to take God's Word more seriously and investigate what God has revealed about His will and ways as you make decisions about the kind of friends you choose (Proverbs has a ton to say about that), about the entertainment choices you make, about the way you treat or ignore behavioral problems with your children, about the way you communicate with your spouse, about the way you deal with your anger, about the way you dress and the parts of your body you choose to expose, about how you deal with a shady business deal, about how you handle parents and in-laws who try to compete with you for the hearts of your kids by the gifts they buy, about how much you spend at Christmas and by your response to the proposition that no parent could possibly love their kid who has not gotten them in ipod shuffle—and so on!!

Brothers and sisters—the Bible has something to say about every one of those kinds of situations—and much, much more! If you are serious about producing the fruit of light in those situations, you had better examine your commitment to studying the book that promises to be a light to your feet and a lamp to your paths. Failure to do so will lead to much stumbling in the dark—when you could have been a light to others!

Light shines. But in order to shine, you need the batteries of God's Word to light the light of biblical discernment. But there is more...

- C. Light **exposes** (11-12) *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.*

Here is the million dollar question. Just how is light supposed to expose. I grew up around an emphasis that took this very passage as a mandate to slander and gossip. I can't tell you how many Christian newspapers that spent much of their time pointing out how a certain pastor or organization was compromising the faith. First of all, this is not about how we deal with concerns with brothers and sisters. We don't go around exposing a brother who is in trouble by airing his dirty laundry before the congregation. Jesus has clearly and carefully defined the nature and process of how we are to handle problems in His church.

I think it is fairly apparent that Paul is talking about how light is to expose the works of darkness—meaning the inevitable result when a Christian lifestyle intersects the world. What happens when light confronts darkness? It *exposes* what is there!

Illustration: Early in my ministry I went to visit a poor family that lived in an apartment that had a serious problem with cockroaches. Hundreds of them—no thousands. But I was not prepared for what happened when I walked into

the kitchen and turned on the light. There was a massive flight of cockroaches whose comfort in the darkness was disturbed by the light! I didn't have to confront them in any sort of belligerent way to cause them to scurry away. The light itself exposed them.

So what does it mean to confront or expose sin? Picket the lunch room? Put up tracts on the bulletin board entitled "Turn or Burn?!"? Be known as a "feisty fundamentalist?" *The answer:* Just be yourself! (That is, who you are *in Christ!*) When you do that, you are turning on the light in their kitchen.

Question: Is there a place for speak to the evident darkness of a co-worker? Absolutely. After you're the light of your life has flushed them out of the dark and they are desperate enough to talk—you can have some great opportunities to speak with them. But the emphasis in the Scripture is a life that provides a platform from which to speak.

Illustration: My own brother and his wife are having Bible studies with a couple of neighbors. Not because they went around and recruited them to have a Bible study. But because the way they are raising their children to know and and reverence the Lord has caught the attention of their neighbors who in turn are curious about God's truth and the power of the Gospel to make a difference in a family. But light does more than expose, it...

- D. Light *transforms* (13-14) *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."*

God uses our light to *change* other people.

Illustration: I saw this illustrated in a co-worker with whom my father worked for several years (actually with several co-workers but I will give one example). This man and my dad seemed to have little in common. There was a night and day difference in the way they lived. I assumed it would stay that way. For several years my father tried to share Christ with him—but there was no interest. Why? This man seemed to have everything—nice clothes. Beautiful home. Popularity. That was on the outside. Inside he was a mess. His marriage was in shambles. He lived on the verge of bankruptcy. Until one day his world came apart. And that is the day I came home from school only to find him and my dad on their knees in our living room where this man had just accepted Christ. The light that had exposed his life did more than reveal the differences—and his need of a Savior from his own darkness. God graciously used that light to bring him to saving faith. Because that is what light does. It ultimately changes people. It will either do that—or one day it will judge us. How are you responding to the Light? If you have received the One who is the Light—how are you reflecting His light to the darkness *around* you?

