

Life in the Light

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[0 : 00] The introduction to our passage this morning as we turn to it in Ephesians chapter 5, I want to find in verses 1 and 2, the two verses that come immediately before the passage that was just read for us.

So if you look at Ephesians chapter 5 verses 1 and 2, it says there, Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children, and live a life of love just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Live a life of love just as Christ loved us. But the outworking of that life of love, a life of love which is shaped and molded and seen in Christ's love for us, the outworking of that life of love is immensely practical.

It is immensely rooted in reality, in down-to-earth, daily Christian living. It sounds kind of dreamy and optimistic to think, well, I'm going to go and live a life of love.

Nobody would really in the world deny the value of that. If that's all they knew from the Scriptures, go and live a life of love. But what Paul goes on to show us in the passage that follows in verses 3 to 14 is that there is nothing impractical or dreamy or unrealistic about such a life.

[1 : 45] I felt I was very privileged this morning to hear, just because I was driving along the M8 at the time, a program on Radio 4 which was an insight into the world of those who go to weekly Al-Anon meetings, a support group for those who suffer with the effects of alcoholism in their families.

Now, I know that with a group this size, in fact a group a quarter or a fifth of this size, there will be many of us thus affected.

And these people were speaking about the realities of life where a struggle in their home or in their family or in their immediate circle of friends is the struggle of coping with the ongoing effects of alcoholism.

And I thought as I drove through that there are so many parallels between what these people were saying and benefiting from and what this passage says to us.

For in reality, what this passage says to us is that we are all recovering sinners. We are all recovering sinners.

[3 : 06] Forgiven people if we're in the Lord Jesus Christ and a child of God by faith in Jesus. Forgiven but recovering.

And this passage plunges us into areas of life and temptation and human sinfulness that we don't like to be plunged into.

They are topics that we like to keep to one side. But the Bible is too realistic to allow us to do that. And so as we look at the passage, these 14 verses this morning, I want to do so just in these three simple sections.

First of all, verses 1 to 7, or if you prefer verses 3 to 7, being realistic about what we are.

Being realistic about what we are. Why does the apostle have to warn the Ephesians in this way?

[4 : 09] Among you, there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality or of any kind of impurity or of greed. Because these are improper for God's holy people.

Now, to understand that verse, we can legitimately and doctrinally and with responsibility put the word unrepentant in front of those sins.

There must not be even a hint of unrepentant or if you prefer unforgiven or if you prefer hardened, heart-hardened sexual immorality or of any kind of impurity.

Why does the apostle have to warn the Ephesians about these standards of Christian living within the fellowship at Ephesus? What is the need? They've come from a culture in Ephesus that is full of the culture of the goddess Diana, the Artemis culture, which was every bit as immoral and far from

the God who created us as any human culture ever is.

These people, these believers, had been redeemed and brought into the Christian fellowship. Why the need to give these warnings? Surely the people knew that. Well, the need is because he wants them to be realistic about what they are.

[5 : 35] They are forgiven children of God by faith in Jesus Christ. But like us, we are still fallen.

We are still prone to stumble and to sin. We are still vulnerable to the accusations and the temptations of the evil one.

If we weren't, there would be no need for a prayer like the prayer of confession that we said this morning, week by week. If we weren't vulnerable in that kind of way, if we weren't still fallen and prone to sinfulness and waywardness, then the New Testament would never need to speak about being careful, about watching out for the attacks of the evil one.

The Scriptures would never need to warn us as they so repeatedly do, to stay on guard, to watch for the final day coming.

No, the Bible knows that we are redeemed and fallen. We are recovering sinners. And like the wise recovering alcoholic, there is not a day when we don't realistically recognize that we could wander off course today.

[7 : 06] With that kind of reality check in place, what does the apostle mean when he says in verse 6, Let no one deceive you with empty words.

For because of such things, God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. What are these empty words?

He's been very careful to list the kind of sins that affect us all, immorality and impurity and greed, obscenity and foolish talk and coarse joking, which are out of place.

And then he says so starkly in verse 5, For of this you can be sure, no immoral, and again we can rightly, to help us understand, no unrepentant, immoral, impure, or greedy person has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

Let no one deceive you with empty words. Who was speaking to the church? And what were the empty words that they were saying?

[8 : 32] I guess that we can legitimately conclude from the passage that the empty words were not the words of people who were going to come along and say, Oh, you know, we can be the Christian church in Ephesus and actually just turn the whole church into another shrine in the culture of Artemis.

I don't think anybody would have been so crass as to assume that that would be possible. Nobody was going to hoodwink the Ephesian believers into abandoning their faith publicly and wholesale and erecting another statue to the goddess Diana in their midst and saying that that was compatible with following the Lord Jesus Christ.

No, the empty words I think we can deduce were the words of those who would have said, In contrast to verse 3, a little sexual immorality, a little impurity, a little greed is fine.

As long as it doesn't cross the line, you know. I mean, coarse joking is all okay. As long as the coarse joking is with those who are on the same page as you and won't be offended.

Greed is fine and so is obscenity. As long as it doesn't go too far. And thus the slippery slope is laid out for the believers.

[10 : 15] Because the empty words that ignore the coming wrath of God are the empty words who say, A little sin is okay.

Whereas those of us who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ and confess our sins day by day and together in church week by week are those who are always ready to say that no sin is okay.

We stumble and fall and we feel our way through the darkness of this world and we are battered and bruised by the tempter and we know our own sins only too well.

But we are never happy to have them within our lives and hearts and minds. We're always those who are willing to say with Paul, no, I don't want any unforgiven, unrepentant sin.

Be realistic about what we are. As forgiven, redeemed children of God, we are never in this world more than recovering sinners.

[11 : 21] But Paul goes on to a slightly different tack in verses 8 to 10. And here I want to say that we should not just be realistic about what we are, we should be true to what we have become.

Look at verses 8 to 10. For you were once darkness, but now you are light.

Reminds me of the Sermon on the Mount, doesn't it, you? Jesus saying to the disciples, you are the light of the world. You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

So live according to what you have become. Live as children of light. Be what you are. Live in harmony with what the Lord Jesus has died and redeemed you to be.

For God's people to live taking hold of the resources that they have been given by the grace of God is a Bible pattern.

[12:36] This is not just a New Testament picture. Think of the children of Israel wandering through the desert and being given the Ten Commandments. What was God saying to the children of Israel in the Ten Commandments?

He was saying, live like this because I have redeemed you from slavery. Live as my people when you are wandering through these years of wilderness.

Live according to these commandments because I have set you free from slavery. Be what you are. The same pattern was evident when the children of God arrived at the River Jordan and were about to take possession of the promised land and the Lord's repeated cry to them was, take possession of the land that I have given you, that is yours.

Take what is yours. Own what I have provided. And this is very much the thrust and the direction and the power of this passage.

Don't live according to what you were. You were once darkness, but now, because of the Lord Jesus Christ, you are light in Him. That is the fundamental truth of the gospel.

[13:57] You are now in Christ. And Christ is in you by His Spirit. One of the old hymn writers said, Think what Spirit dwells within you.

What a Father's smile is thine. What the Savior died to win you. Child of heaven.

Should you repine? Should you sin? Should you give up when you remember who it is that dwells in you?

That's the emphasis and the direction of the teaching here to the Ephesians. I don't think it's ever wise to highlight any one human culture as being particularly more out of line or out of kilter with the call of God on humanity as any other culture.

And just as we watch the history video of UCCF and you go back to the 1930s and see all the Christian Union members in their suits and ties and so on and so on and so on.

[15:25] And were they easier days for Christians? No. They were different. Culture was different. Clothing was different.

Our society was more monochrome. Were they easier? No. Was human nature any less likely to sin back in the 1930s than in 2017?

No. Not at all. There is always an inbuilt resistance in the human heart to the gospel. And the gospel is always saying to Christian people, live according to what Christ has done for you and according to who Christ has placed in you.

For the fruit of light, he goes on to say in verse 9, consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth. Find out what pleases the Lord.

I think these verses are exactly the same as Ephesians chapter 1. I don't know when you began your series in Ephesians, but Ephesians chapter 1 is such a doctrinally rich passage that describes in Trinitarian language the role of Father and Son and Spirit in redemption.

[16:57] But this passage, it's not that Ephesians 1 is the theology and Ephesians 5 is the practical. These two belong together. The person who writes chapter 5 to us is assuming that we're those who have read chapter 1.

So he's saying here when he says you are light in the Lord, he's assuming that from chapter 1 his readers have taken in and who know that in him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.

And when sin crouches at the door as it does and when the battle against the devil is ferocious and when we are stumbling and falling it is not it is not that the resources that we need are unavailable to us.

It is that we just need to get up and be what we are. The recovering alcoholic who spoke on Radio 4 this morning spoke of how every morning he now wakes up after 20 years of sobriety.

He now wakes up and realizes afresh as his eyes open and the daylight hits his face. He realizes afresh that well what he said was I shouldn't have been here I should be dead and so my wife and

children and my job and the breakfast on my table are always like fresh gifts every morning.
[18 : 46] That is the language of the redeemed. That is him waking up each day to be again what he has become and that is what Paul is asking the Ephesian believers to be finally and briefly.

be realistic about what you are as a fallen sinful person. Be true to what you have become in Christ Jesus and thirdly verses 11 to 14 be careful about how you live.

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 but everything exposed by the light becomes visible for it is light that makes everything visible.

comfortable. It is like that isn't it when we are watching television and we are perfectly comfortable watching what we are watching but we would not be if our granny was watching it with us because her presence would bring a certain kind of light onto the shameful deeds of darkness that we have become comfortable with.

And what the apostle is saying to the believers here is you don't need to go and experience and to be all mugged up and knowledgeable about all the latest inventions of darkness to reach people who are without Christ.

[20 : 18] You don't need to be immersed in sin to know what sinners are looking at or listening to or watching. You don't need to do that. You need to hold out the light of the Lord Jesus Christ to them.

I do think we can take contextualization a bit too far and it is a dangerous thing to do to begin to say oh we need to fully understand our culture in order to be able to reach it.

I don't understand anything about our culture. My team members would tell you that when they mention anything modern and by modern I mean from after about 1900 in terms of music or film acting or I've never heard of any of them.

But that doesn't mean you can't tell people about Jesus and him being your saviour. Does it? I don't think it does. have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness but rather expose them for it is shameful even to mention what your granny wouldn't want you to be watching.

And then he ends with this lovely little three point text sermon. wake up oh sleeper this is why it is said this is the message of the Christian to the world lost in darkness wake up oh sleeper from Romans rise from the dead from Isaiah 26 and Christ will shine on you from Isaiah chapter 60 not a great three point sermon evangelistic sermon wake up oh sleeper you're there in the cave of broken humanity sad and broken and sinful and in darkness wake up you've fallen asleep in your sin a gospel shout to wake up and then a gospel command to rise from the dead like Lazarus heard rise from the dead and then a gospel pardon

[22 : 35] Christ will shine on you be careful how you live don't spend your time mugging up in darkness but rather in every way proclaim in any way you can the wonderful light of the Lord Jesus in a way that will wake up the sleeping that's really what we're about isn't it as Christian people in our mission and witness it's what you're about this evening when you have your life explored group coming in it's what we're about in the Christian unions saying to a lost and needy world wake up rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you be careful how you live and live proclaiming this gospel let's pray for a moment our gracious heavenly father the sins that are listed here in this passage are sins that we know too well we recognize what our hearts are like and so how glad we are to remember the forgiveness that you've bought the blood that you have shed the spirit whom you have given the life that we can live dear heavenly father help us this coming week to be what we are in your precious son and for his name's sake amen you who