

When Christ Shines On You

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[0 : 00] So, how do you respond to this text? What is your initial reaction to this section of the letter? The Apostle Paul, the Apostle of Grace, as he is called, writes to the believers in the first century city of Ephesus.

Some of you would, I imagine, say, Oh, man, I get enough negative noise from work and home. I don't need this text. Some of you, I imagine, would say, No wonder people don't want to read their Bibles anymore.

Still others would say, It's about time somebody said some hard things. This world's going down the tubes. Some others would say, I already know I'm not living the life I'm supposed to live.

This just makes me feel worse. And others, wow, like this is getting a little too close. This is invading private places in my life, and I'm just going to tune out.

I understand all those initial reactions. And I submit to you that if you will give this text a hearing, if you will let the text do what I think the Apostle Paul wrote it to do, you will discover that this text is very liberating.

[1 : 25] You will discover that this text is actually saturated with gospel. It is full of good news. It is? Yes, it is.

You see, the text is simply illustrating what happens when Jesus Christ, the light of the world, shines on us, shines on you, shines on me.

In the last verse of the text, in verse 14, Paul writes, For this reason, it says. For this reason is Paul's way of undergirding what he developed before the for this reason.

For this reason, I say to you, Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you. What Paul is addressing in the text before the for this reason are the kinds of things from which sleepers awake, from which those who are dead are raised when Christ the Messiah shines on sleepy, dead human beings.

For this reason, it says. It says. What says? Most of the time when Paul or other writers of the New Testament uses this phrase, it says, he and they are referring to texts of Scripture, which for them at that time was only the Old Testament.

[2 : 56] But there is no Old Testament text that says, Awake, sleeper, arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you. Many biblical scholars suggest that what we have in Ephesians 5.14 is an early Christian hymn, an early Christian worship song.

The fact is, in the New Testament, we find many of these early Christian hymns, like Philippians 2, chapters 5 to 11, the text we worked with last week when we looked at Paul's exhortation, Be Imitators of God.

Have this mind in you, which was in Christ Jesus, who because he existed in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to take advantage of, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being found in the likeness of humanity.

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore also, God has highly exalted him, and given him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

I have, most of my life, wondered how that song was sung in the early church. Or, Colossians 1, 15 to 20, the song that got a hold of me in university when studying physics and theoretical mathematics.

[4 : 25] Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him, all things were created in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things have been created by him and for him, and in him all

things hold together.

He's also the head of the body, the church, he's the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. Oh, I want to know how that was sung in the cities of the Roman Empire.

And there's the hymn in 1 Timothy 3, 16, which Paul calls the mystery of godliness. He who was revealed in the flesh, was vindicated in the spirit, beheld by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

And all of these examples from the New Testament have then worked their way into the worship, vocabulary, and life of the church throughout history. And then there is this hymn, or more accurately, this little chorus in the letter to the Ephesians.

It was lightly sung at baptisms. It was not the only time it was sung, but it was lightly sung because, lightly sung there, because it was appropriate to sing over believers as they emerged from the waters of baptism.

[5 : 45] Awake, sleeper, arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you. Last Tuesday, when Andrea Tischer and I were working on planning the worship service, Andrea got the idea to try to put this little chorus to music.

So Andrea, come and share what came to you after we prayed. Thank you for meticulously, do deep.

home home Now, even though Paul does not directly quote a biblical text when he says, for this reason it says, he is likely incorporating a number of Old Testament texts in this little hymn.

Like Isaiah chapter 9, verse 2. The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. Those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them.

Leading up to that great Christmas text I can hardly wait to preach for unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given. And Isaiah 60, verses 1 and 2.

[7 : 36] Arise and shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness will cover the earth, deep darkness the peoples, but the Lord will rise upon you, and his glory will appear upon you.

This was the expectation of Zacharias the priest, the father of John the Baptist, who when his son was born, sang of another son, Mary's son, saying this, the sunrise from on high shall visit us, to shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace, into the way of shalom, into the way of wholeness.

And all of this then, I think, is taken up in this little course that Paul cites. Now, the big point I want to make about this hymn or this course is that it undergirds everything that Paul has been saying before he cites it.

From chapter 5, verse 3 to verse 13, Paul is simply opening up to us what happens when Christ wakes us from mental and spiritual sleep, when Christ raises us from the dead, when Christ shines on us.

When he does, says Paul, all things become visible. Verse 11, we begin to see things differently. All things become visible when they are exposed by the light, he says.

[9 : 09] I love it when new believers, fresh from a saving encounter with Jesus Christ, say things like, where have I been all my life?

I see things I've never seen before. As the 19th century hymn sings, something lives in every hue Christless eyes have never seen.

When the light shines, we begin to see differently. We begin to see the world clearly, which results in both joy and sorrow. We begin to see ourselves clearly, which also results in both joy and sorrow. We begin to see governments and corporations and all of their movements differently, which, depending upon what the leaders do with those governments and corporations, either discourage or encourage us.

And we begin to see God differently, which results in a whole host of emotions. All things become visible when they are exposed by the light.

[10 : 13] Awake, sleeper, arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you. Awake, O sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.

Awake, O sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you. And when he does, says Paul, we become light.

Amazing. Look at verse 8. For you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Not, you formerly walked in darkness, and now you walk in light, although that is a true statement, but you were darkness, and now you are light.

Again, amazing. I'm not sure all that Paul has in his mind when he makes this claim, but I have witnessed it again and again. When a person comes to Christ, or as I should say, when Christ comes to a person, when Christ gets hold of a person, and makes all things visible, the light radiates out of them in their eyes and on their skin.

You have seen it, have you not? Now, why the globe fades, that's another matter. But it is there. And people will say to the new believer, there's something different about you.

[11 : 41] There's something I can see on you. You are different. Not perfect, but different. Because in some sense, we become light. In union with the light.

In intimacy with the light of the world himself. We become, in some sense, light. The fact is, we do slowly become like that to which we constantly expose ourselves.

Be exposed to the very light of life. And there is a sense in which we become light. Awake, sleeper. Arise from the dead.

And Christ will shine on you. Awake, oh sleeper. And rise from the dead. And Christ will shine on you.

Awake, oh sleeper. And rise from the dead. And Christ will shine on you. And when he does, says Paul, we want to be clean.

[12 : 42] We want to be clean. Like he is clean. Verse 3. Do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named among you as is proper among saints.

In the verse right before that, Paul calls us to walk in love. He is suggesting then that the opposite of walking in love is immorality, impurity, and greed.

The word he uses that we translate immorality is the word pornea, which works its way into the English language in the word pornography. One of the biggest industries in our time.

Funded by corporations you would be shocked to have named. Eating away at the soul of our world. causing a lot of people to go to sleep mentally and spiritually and bringing all kinds of relational havoc.

The light of the world breaks this spell. Thanks be to him. He breaks through the darkness, grabs hold of our souls, and leads us into freedom. He breaks the spell of greed.

[13 : 47] This is the same word that's translated otherwise as covetousness. The tenth commandment. You shall not covet your neighbor's house or your neighbor's wife. And a lot of money fuels greed and coveting in our time.

But when Christ shines, things begin to change. We discover, sometimes to our horror, that Paul is right. Coveting is idolatry. Didn't that line grab you as you heard it?

Coveting is idolatry. Verse 5. The covetous man is an idolater. We make a God out of that which we covet. We have to have this thing or this person.

And all of life now revolves around getting that thing or that person. Lord, please shine. Radiate through all of our idolatry because we do not want to live for false gods.

Awake, sleeper, and rise from the dead. And Christ will shine on you. Awake, sleeper, and rise from the dead.

[14 : 49] And Christ will shine on you. Awake, sleeper, and rise from the dead. And Christ will shine on you.

When he does, says Paul, we begin to speak in different ways. Our speech changes. Verse 4. There must be no filthiness or silly talk or coarse jesting which are not fitting but rather giving of thanks.

He is referring to this putting down of other people with words. He is referring to obscenity and vulgarity. All of it out of sync with love. John Stott put it so well.

The reason why Christians should dislike and avoid vulgarity is not because we have a warped view of sex and we are either ashamed or afraid of it but because we have a high and holy view of it as being in its right place God's gift which we do not want to see cheapened.

Interestingly, in this text, Paul says that the antidote to foul and unholy speech is giving thanks.

Why? Because giving thanks for other people makes us realize that other people are God's creation.

[16:03] And to treat them poorly is to mistreat a gift that God has given. No one in their right mind, no one in the light wants to denigrate anything God has made and given.

And gratitude powerfully checks the instincts of lust and covetousness and sarcasm. When the light goes on, life is revealed and experienced as gift.

People are a gift. Yes, some are problematic and some we want to give names to that design their problems. But using such speech never achieves anything and it only rots our souls.

Giving thanks keeps things in perspective. Awake, sleeper, arise from the dead and Christ will shine on you. Awake, oh sleeper, and rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you.

Awake, go sleeper and rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you. When he does, says Paul, the kingdom of God becomes more real to us.

[17:17] And we want to live consistent with the kingdom. Verse 5, for this you know with certainty that no immoral or impure person or covetous man who is an idolater has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

Now Paul is not referring to momentary lapses. He's referring to this deliberate, intentionally repeated, settled choices. Why no inheritance in the kingdom?

Because, thank God, the kingdom is all about wholeness and righteousness and goodness and beauty. The further into the kingdom we go, or as I should say, the further into the kingdom that Jesus draws us, the more we realize how good it is and the more we find things incongruous with the kingdom odious and we want them to be taken away.

This partly explains why when we get serious about following Jesus into the kingdom, life becomes uncomfortable. A number of you have been sharing that with me, that your life is getting more difficult and internally more struggles.

That's a good sign. The kingdom values are coming up against values that are nurtured by greed and lust and fear and our worlds are being turned upside down which thankfully means they're getting turned right side up again.

[18:41] Awake, sleeper, arise from the dead and Christ will shine on you. Awake, sleeper, and rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you.

Awake, go sleeper, and rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you. And when he does, says Paul, we understand one of the reasons for so much of the turmoil in our world today.

The wrath of God. Verse 6. Let no one deceive you with empty words for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the children of disobedience.

Up to this point in his letter, Paul has been celebrating nothing but grace. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.

Everything has been about God's goodness and mercy and grace. Why then bring up this wrath? wrath. The wrath of God is not what most people think it is.

[19:48] The wrath of God is not God throwing lightning bolts and lightning and thunder bolts at human beings with whom he's disgusted. No, the wrath of God is, as Australian scholar Leon Morris helped me see, the wrath of God is God's settled opposition to all that is incongruous with his love and his holiness.

We bless him for that wrath. God's settled opposition to all that is incongruous with his love and with his holiness. And, it is primarily expressed in letting us have our way.

The wrath of God is God letting us have our way. I would rather have lightning and thunder bolts.

The wrath of God is giving us up to the full implications of our not wanting him in his way.

When God sees a person or a nation finally not choosing him or his way, he lets that person or nation have their way.

Christ shines on us to help us realize just how critical what we do with him is. choose other gods like pornography or violence or racism or consumerism and we become like them.

[21:11] That is wrath. And the God of grace shines the light of life into the darkness so that we know how consequential human decisions actually are.

Awake, sleeper. Arise from the dead and Christ will shine on you. Awake, oh sleeper and rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you.

Awake, oh sleeper and rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you. When he does, says Paul, our ambitions change.

Now we want to do everything to please Jesus Christ. Verse 8. Walk as children of light trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.

Of course. When the light goes on, you want to live in sync with the light in every realm of life. In every realm of life, what pleases you, Lord?

[22 : 14] In work, what pleases you, Lord? In relationships, what pleases you? In entertainment, in sports, what pleases you? In the books we read, in the movies we see, what pleases you, Lord?

How we spend his money, what pleases you, Lord? When the light goes on, you want as never before to live in full harmony with him. Right? Awake, sleeper, arise from the dead and Christ will shine on you.

Awake, oh sleeper, and rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you. Awake, oh sleeper, and rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you.

When he does, says Paul, the world around you is affected. Verse 7, do not be partakers with them. Verse 11, do not partake in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead expose them. He does not say what many have made him out to say.

[23 : 25] He does not say do not associate with them. For one thing, it's not possible. And for another thing, it does not please the Lord.

How are people to know the Lord of love unless those who know the Lord of love hang out with people? If we hang out in holy huddles, we'll never make that impact in the world. What Paul says is do not partake, do not participate, and even expose.

Now note carefully, not persons, not persons, but deeds. That's a big distinction. Paul does not say that somehow the children of light expose people.

That's not on the agenda. The light does not expose people. Jesus Christ does not shine the light to embarrass us. The light does not expose people.

It exposes the dark deeds that are ruining people's lives. And those who walk in the light walk in dark places so that dark deeds and dark attitudes and dark schemes are exposed.

[24 : 37] Sometimes the children of light do this by speaking. As the churches in our city and world may need to do very soon regarding the horrific phenomena of sex trafficking.

This is the 21st century. This is supposed to be an enlightened society. How in heaven's name can such a thing as sex trafficking happen right here in this city?

I cannot begin to imagine the pain of little girls yanked from their homes, sold as slaves, and being used by grown men.

And I cannot begin to imagine how dark it must be in the soul of a man who does this. Can you imagine anything darker?

That's almost just animal. It's barely human. Expose this darkness, Jesus. Burn your light into such inhumanity and use us if you need.

[25 : 43] but the exposure happens mostly by the children of light simply showing up by their mere presence bringing conviction about the deeds of darkness.

I still remember the last time I went skiing 15 years ago now. my sons had gotten in the gondola before me and I got in the next chair and sat next to a woman I did not know.

And all the way up the mountain she was going on and on about this party she was going to go to that night. She spoke enthusiastically about all the drugs that were going to be exchanged and all the drinking that was going on and she was looking forward to all of this good sex that was going to happen.

I just listened and I prayed. And on and on she went celebrating all of this non-kingdom stuff. And then just before we reached the top of the mountain she asked me what I did for a living.

I never like that moment when I'm around the city. I am a Christian pastor. I said gently. She flipped out.

[26 : 59] Oh my God. Oh my God. Oh my God. And I asked the Lord to credit her words as a prayer. Oh my God. If I'd known I would have not said any of this to you.

She was in misery or more accurately she was under severe mercy. And she could hardly wait until we reached the top. And as she readied herself to leave the chair and ski down the hill I whispered to her he knows you know.

Off she flew really fast. I look forward to meeting that woman one day in the fully realized kingdom of God because she came under such conviction that I knew it would lead her to Jesus Christ.

Awake sleeper arise from the dead and Christ will shine on you. Awake oh sleeper and rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you.

Awake oh sleeper and rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you. and when he does we experience a desperate need for God.

[28 : 19] We realize as never before that we cannot live and be whole without God. Paul does not say so in the text but everything leads up to it.

There's no way that we can live free and clean without God without the Father without the Lord Jesus without the Holy Spirit. Do you know the name Douglas Copeland?

Douglas Copeland is the creative Canadian novelist who first introduced terms like Mick Job and Generation X. Toward the end of a collection of essays which he entitled After God Copeland writes this.

Now here is my secret. I speak to you with an openness of heart that I doubt I will ever achieve again. So I pray that you are in a quiet room as you hear these words. My secret is that I need God. I am sick and can no longer make it alone. I need God to help me give because I am no longer able to give. To help me be kind as I am no longer capable of kindness.

[29 : 26] To help me love as I seem beyond being able to love. I read that and I said yes. Yes, yes, yes. The light is shining.

Jesus Christ the light is shining. A sleeper is waking up. Someone from the dead is being raised. You see, it's the spiritually and mentally asleep who do not think they need God.

It's the spiritually and mentally dead who think they can go tomorrow, Monday through Saturday without God. When the light of life breaks in, finally a human being becomes a human being because he or she recognizes how desperately we want and need God.

Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.