

Children of Light

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[0 : 0 0] name. Amen. Well, we've been going through a series on Ephesians here at Crow Road on Sunday mornings, and that grew out of a discussion, that decision that Colin, in consultation with Nate and I, grew out of a discussion about what constitutes a healthy church. What are the markers, the evidences of a healthy church? And since Ephesians is, for all intents and purposes, one of Paul's letters that is about the church, it seemed that there would be a good chance that we could learn something from taking the time to go through it together. Now, as I've already kind of alluded to, Ephesians is a theologically and doctrinally rich book, and to be honest, we have moved quickly, and sometimes maybe even too quickly through it. But part of that pace is determined by what motivated the series. What is a healthy church? So we have tended to major on issues that shed light on that question. And today, what I'm hoping is that we'll see that one of the evidences of a healthy church is how well it carries out its responsibility to those who are not Christians. And that responsibility can be described in a number of ways, but in today's passage, it is described as we, the Christians, as the church, being children of light. Children of light. Now, Paul is writing to a church that is primarily made up of non-Jewish or Gentile believers. And I think it's safe to say that in our experience, we have only been in churches primarily made up of non-Jewish believers.

So that's the norm. But at this time, it was something that was radical. And why was that? Well, because Jesus, Jesus is the fulfillment of promises made to the forefathers of the Jews, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, when he promised that Abraham's descendants would be his own special people.

But with the coming of Jesus and the preaching of the gospel, the message about Jesus, Gentiles were now coming to believe in Jesus as their savior. And as a result, they were now being included in God's special people. Now, Paul fought hard for this new understanding of who can be counted as God's people. And he paid a great price for it. Persecution, prison, and ultimately even death was the price that he paid. But he did it because he knew it to be true. And in this letter, he places a great deal of stress on it, both in assuring believing Gentiles of their equal status before God with believing Jews, but also of what this new reality means for them practically in their lives.

Let's rehearse again just a few of these things that we've already come across as we've looked at this letter. Listen to this kind of summation of what Paul says to these Gentile believers.

Remember that one time, you Gentiles in the flesh, so he's acknowledging that they're not from the descendants of Abraham. And he's going to say that they become, as it were, non-Gentiles in so much that they have been made covenant people of God. But he says, remember that at one time, you Gentiles in the flesh were separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now, in Christ Jesus, you who are once far off have been brought near, for he has made us both one. He has created in himself one new man in place of the two. So writing to these Gentiles, he says, so then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.

[4 : 05] In him, you are also being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. This is radical stuff in its day. And it falls on us and we can say, yes, thank you, thank you. But do we ever really stop and say, wait a minute, I'm a Gentile. How did I get into the covenant? But it's by the grace of God, through the gift of Jesus, bringing even people like us into that glorious redemptive strain that he moved after he makes a covenant with Abraham. So these that he's writing to have been brought into a new relationship, this God's covenant people. And practically, their new relationship that these Gentiles in the flesh find themselves demands that they now live differently than they used to. As we've already heard in previous messages, put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds and put on the new self created after the likeness of God and true righteousness and holiness.

See, where once in their ignorance of God's commands, they would do whatever they wanted to. They would do what everybody else did all around them, or they would do things to gain other people's approval. But now, now they're called to displace, displace their ignorance by learning the will of God and living a life that is shaped by God's will. And rather than seeking the approval of people, they're living to seek the approval of God. So as Colin taught last Sunday, we no longer live just for ourselves, inwardly focused, desiring first and foremost what makes us happy, what pleases us.

But now, in this new life, we have been given. We live for God, and we live for others. So, these Gentile believers have been brought into this new relationship as God's covenant people.

They've also been brought into a new role, a role associated with that new relationship, and that is to be the light of the world. And that's what we're going to talk a bit about today.

See, as God's covenant people, they stand in the stream of what God has been revealing as he's called Abraham and his descendants to be his people. And when it comes down to Israel, he's looking at Israel as the people of God, these special people that he's chosen for himself through whom he is going to bring his purposes to bear upon the world. And listen to what he says in Isaiah 60, verses 1-3.

[6 : 38] So, there's darkness over the face of the earth, but God says, I'm going to bring my light to bear on my people, and it will draw other people to me. Alec Mottier, famous Isaiah commentator, light dawning among God's people is the first banishment of this darkness, and is designed, listen, designed to magnetize the world to blessing. It's like a magnet drawing people to itself.

Magnetize the world into blessing. The Lord starts with his people in order that he may encompass the world. God starts with his people in order he may encompass the world. So, as we've seen in Ephesians, God has had a plan, a plan that he set in eternity, and he is working that plan. And these Gentiles in the flesh, who have now been made members of the covenant people of God, despite their lack of lineage that descended from Abraham, they have a role to play, a role to play in that plan.

And I believe this is what Paul calls them to in our passage in chapter 5. You see, similar to what we heard in the Isaiah passage, and frankly, was also in our call to worship, similar to what we heard in those passages, in Ephesians 5, Paul speaks of darkness and light. And this language started actually in the chapter before, in chapter, chapter before, chapter 4, in verses 17 and 19.

Now, this I say and testify in the Lord that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them. Due to their hardness of heart, they become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. Now, Colin has spoken about the fruit of this giving themselves up to this.

And Paul's exhortation out of that, he says that you've got to put that aside and to live for others. And chapter 4 closes with this, be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. See, he's calling these Gentile believers who formerly were not shaped by God's revealed will. The ideas that were shaping their thoughts, the ideologies, the practices, the history, the traditions that were shaping what they did on a daily basis, perhaps not in everything that they did, but in an awful lot of what they did was contradicting the word of God. Contradicting how it is that we are created to live and now have been redeemed to live. And so he's calling these Gentile believers out of that milieu into life with Jesus. And so therefore, he says, be imitators of God as beloved children and walk in love as Christ loved you and gave himself for us, a fragrant offering and a sacrifice to God. So rather than the way in which, you know, they used to live, which we used to live, as people use others for their own benefit, whether it's emotionally through self-justifying anger or physically, by stealing, verbally by abusive or corrupting talk, rather than using others, we are to serve others.

[10 : 24] Walking in sacrificial love for others. And the measure of that is Jesus, who, as Paul says, loved us, gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Where before they were giving themselves up to callous sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity, they are now to be like Jesus, who gave himself up for others.

In verses 3 to 6, in chapter 5, he addresses the kind of behavior, what he will go on to call the unfruitful works of darkness that provokes the wrath of God.

But sexual immorality, all impurity, covetousness, that could also be translated greed, same word that's up before when he says about them being greedy, all impurity or greediness must not even be named among you as is proper among the saints, let there be no filthiness, foolish talk, for you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral, impure, covetous, greedy, idolater has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

He says this, let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things, the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. See, despite however much people have tried to explain away, and continue to explain away, God's prohibitions against this kind of behavior, Paul says, don't be persuaded by it.

[11 : 50] Don't be persuaded by such arguments. God's wrath is real, and it's not to be trifled with. And there he goes on, therefore he says, now in verse 7 and 8, and here's where the role of a Christian being light is introduced.

Do not become partners with them, for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light, for the fruit of light is found in all that is good, and right, and true, and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

So what is he saying to them? He's saying, once you were the offspring of darkness, you were the children of darkness, and your understanding of what was good, and right, and true was all messed up, confused, misdirected, clouded by ignorance and sin, but that is no longer your lot.

You've learned about Christ. You have placed your faith in him. You have access to the good, and the right, and the true, revealed in God's will. You are now among those whom God has called out of darkness to be light in the darkness.

They are numbered among those whom God has called out of darkness in order to shed light in the darkness. The very first sermon I preached when I was here arrived about a year ago was entitled, In the world, not of the world, yet for the world.

[13 : 20] And the concept behind that, we've heard that term a lot if you've been around church, you're in the world and not of the world, and indeed it's a biblical concept. We are in the world, but we're no longer to be of the world. What has Paul been arguing right here in this letter?

You're in the world, but don't be like you used to be in the world. You're in the world, but you're not of the world any longer. My argument that I made was, however, that the reason behind that, for God calling us to not be of the world, even though we're in the world, is so that we might be for the world.

See, not unlike what we're going to discover here, I believe, or what God says about Israel, they want to remain in their distinctiveness, who they are as God's people. They want to contain it and remain.

They want to sustain that distinctiveness in order that they might shine the light of Christ into the darkness of the world.

Remember that passage we saw in Isaiah 60. The light will come, and the nations will come to you. There's a magnetizing, as it were, of the nations, when we, as the people of God, are faithful to be the people of God.

[14 : 28] Because the point that God has for us is that, indeed, we would be for the world. We're in it. We're not of it, but we're for it. And so at the end of that sermon, I flipped it.

I said, we're in the world for the world, therefore not of the world. Maintaining our distinctiveness, we do it, not only because it brings blessing into our life, but because we serve as a light to the Gentiles.

So what Paul goes on to say in this letter is I think it's a piece with that idea, and I believe it's a strong, intentional echo of the language that comes that we consider from Isaiah.

Again, these are Gentiles. They're now covenant members. And remember, he's gone to great lengths to teach these non-Jewish believers he is writing to that they are covenant members in the household of God.

They have full access to the privileges of that covenant, but also obligations. Listen again to the role that Israel was intended to play. Arise, shine, your light has come.

[15 : 27] The glory of the Lord has risen upon you. Behold, darkness shall cover the earth, thick darkness the peoples, but the Lord will arise upon you and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light.

Nations shall come to your light. And kings to the brightness of your rising. That's the vision that God has for his people. And I think it's behind what Paul is calling these Gentiles to believe that that's where they now stand.

They've been brought out of darkness into the light and God is asking them to participate in what he is doing through his covenant people. Listen again to this 11 through 14 and see if we don't hear some of that language.

Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, he's writing, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible.

For anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore, it says, Awake, O sleeper, arise from the dead and Christ will shine on you. I'm going to take the liberty of quoting another translation by a fellow named J.B. Phillips.

[16 : 38] And, well, it's more than a translation. It's what we would call a paraphrase and it's even an interpretive one. But I think he gets right, he hits the nail right on the head of what Paul is driving at in this passage.

Steer clear of the activities of darkness. Let your lives show by contrast how dreary and futile these things are. You know the sort of things I mean.

To detail the secrets, to detail their secret doings is really too shameful. For light is capable of showing up everything for what it really is.

It is even possible, after all that happened to you, for light to turn the thing it shines upon into light also. Thus God speaks through the scriptures, awake you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.

I think this is what Paul is driving at. Listen again to what Phillips says. For light to turn the thing it shines upon into light also. That's what God intends to do with his people as he puts, as he allows his light to shine in upon them and through them.

[17 : 43] the nations will come like a magnet. They'll come. The kings will come to the rising. The light that you shine in the midst of darkness will transform darkness into light.

That's what happened to the Gentiles who are listening to this letter as it's being read. They've been brought out of darkness into light. Why? Because somebody showed up with the gospel and shed the light of the truth of Jesus in the midst of that darkness.

Now they're no longer dark. Now they are light, children of light. See, we are children of light. We are to walk in the light. And remember what Amate said, right?

Lighting, that light dawning is designed to magnetize the world into blessing. You see, our putting off the unfruitful works of darkness is right for us because we're children of light.

But it is also good because when we walk in light, our presence exposes and transforms the darkness. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, Paul says, for anything that becomes visible is light.

[18 : 46] And what's produced from that? What's the fruit of light? It's found in all that is good and right and true. All that is good and right and true.

Now, we're called to be light in the midst of the world in order to shine that light into the darkness with the intention of seeing that darkness transformed by the presence of the light of Jesus.

But I will admit and I trust you would too in our honest moments that the brightness of our walk can seem pretty dim. And the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, to use Jesus' words, can stifle our fruitfulness.

But the fact that we've been brought out of darkness into light means that we can become brighter and brighter. What does the Proverbs say? Proverbs 4, 18 to 19, But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until the full day.

The way of the wicked is like deep darkness. They do not know over what they stumble. So, I'm going to suggest that there are things that grow out of this expectation that God has for us is now having been called into God's covenant people that we might be the light in the midst of a dark place.

[20 : 03] There are some expectations that attend that. And despite the fact that we ourselves can be pretty dim because we can be consumed with the cares of our own life, nonetheless, the fruit that God's looking for is what is good, what is right, and what is true.

Listen to this last verse again from that Proverbs, right? The path of the righteous like the light of dawn shines brighter and brighter every day. The way of the wicked is like a deep darkness. They do not know over what they stumble.

They don't even know over what they stumble. Remember what Colin preached, the new life is marked by love for God and love for others. And the fact that those who walk in ignorance and unbelief don't even know what they're stumbling over, I think it's supposed to prick our conscience.

It's supposed to awaken love in us for that. These are our neighbors, our co-workers, even family members. They don't even know what they're stumbling over. You know, if our role in God's plan is that we walk as children of light and the purpose he has for lighting us up is, well, listen, what does Jesus say in Matthew chapter 5?

People do not light a lamp and put it under a basket but on a stand so it gives light to all the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

[21 : 27] That's why God has lighted us up. That's why he has taken us out of darkness and brought us into light so that we might be set upon a stand by him that we might shed light into the rest of the house.

So if that's the expectation, how should we respond? Well, it will play a part. How we respond will play a part in fostering and maintaining a healthy church here on Crow Road and I'm going to suggest in three ways.

Individually, collectively, and comprehensively. Individually, collectively, and comprehensively. Individually. Each of us in our own spheres of relationships are connected to a lot of other people.

And you, as a Christian, are bringing light into all of those places that you walk. The stores you go to frequently, the restaurants you might eat at, the co-workers that you have, the friends, the people that you go out running with or playing golf with.

These are all people that are attached to you who are walking in darkness and don't even know what they're stumbling over. And you, each of us, as Christians, are light in the midst of that dark place.

[22 : 34] That circle of relationship, that sphere of influence that you have in those individual relationships is important for us to see what is our role. Now, it doesn't mean that you walk around all the time with your mouth like some sort of torch all the time in their face, but it does mean you recognize who you are in relationship to those other people.

and pray that God would open up our mouths in those moments that are presented to us by the Holy Spirit that we might, as Paul prays, speak as we ought to speak.

So, individually, we have a responsibility as light bearers to indeed speak into darkness in our relationships. Collectively, collectively, we hear this exhortation as individuals, but not unlike when this letter was first read and then circulated to all the other churches, we receive it collectively by all of us in this room, at once, and those of you that are online.

That is, it fell on their ears of all who were present there and they were expected to do something about it collectively. Virtually all of the yous in Paul's letters are always plural.

We don't really have that anymore in English. If you're from the South in America, go y'all, y'all, you all. That's a plural you. But we don't do that normally in English, right? We just have you.

[23 : 57] But in Greek, there's a plural you and there's a singular you and almost all of them are plural. So when this is read, this letter is read, it's read to a group of people sitting in a room. However, we don't know how many, I don't know, but they're all sitting in a room and they're all hearing this collectively.

Their responsibility is there collectively. So, it fell on their ears and they were expected to do something about it together.

together, by encouraging each other to put off the old self and put on the new, but also to walk as children of light, bearing the fruit of light, good and right and true, the good and the right and the true in the midst of their life together.

And what we want as a collective entity here on Crow Road, what we want is that light to be emanating from this building. For those of us who call this church our home, we want that light to be emanating in the ministry that we offer.

I mean, at night, people can walk by and they'll see lights on and they'll know, oh, somebody must be in that building. But what we want is we want the kind of light that shines even in the middle of the day because if people encounter us, they're encountering the light of Jesus who is himself the light of the world.

[25 : 09] We have an obligation, therefore, to hold one another to this expectation to pursue what is good and right and true because that's the fruit of light. And as we pursue that together, if Mottier's right, it's got a magnetic pull.

It's got a magnetic pull. And so this requires that we live lives of love together in the way spoken of and the other messages that we've heard from this series, loving one another, forgiving one another, and at the end of this passage, submitting to one another so that when people come in or they partake of any of the ministry we offer in the name of the one who is the light of the world, they encounter light and it stands in contrast to the darkness that so marks a life apart from Christ.

So we respond individually. We respond collectively. But I also said we respond comprehensively and this is the last part. Let's see again to what Paul says. Walk as children of light for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true.

The fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true. That all opens up all manners of ways that we can shine light that exposes the unfruitful works of darkness.

So for example, when we collect food, when we collect food so that it can be given to a food bank that is then given out in order to ease the food need of disadvantage that are among us, we're shining light and exposing any unfruitful works of darkness that might be involved in our neighbors being so disadvantaged.

[26 : 49] What we're doing is we're shining light on indifference to suffering. We're shining light on the hoarding of wealth. We're shining light on the general lack of generosity. We're shining light on a withholding of care due to race, ethnicity, or class.

We're shining light on the tendency that we have to quickly judge a person in need as being a victim of their own failings and not considering that calamity can befall a person because of the brokenness of the world.

And frankly, even if the person in need is due to their own sin, if Jesus is any measure, withholding care because an individual has put themselves in a place of need due to their sin is just another work of darkness.

God's abundance of grace overwhelms any purported deserving of the person to receive our care. While we're still sinners, Christ died for us.

See, our bringing food for distribution is an act that exposes the works of darkness and people who receive our care and those around us who observe our giving of care are experiencing the fruit of light, that which is good and right and true.

[27 : 58] And God might just use it to draw them to the light of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ. But that all in Paul's statement, it lends itself thinking even more comprehensively when considering how we might shine light in the hope of transforming darkness into light.

What about the ways that laws are conceived and enacted? Do they reflect the good, the true, and the right? Can our presence as Christians shine light on the process and underlying ideology that's being promoted in an attempt to bear fruit that comes from that presence of light?

What about the capacity for human creativity and the way it's expressed? When it reflects the ignorance and sensuality spoken by Paul in the previous passage, can we do anything to shine light into that darkness that creates the kind of yearning that is anticipated in the Isaiah 2 passage that we read for our call to worship?

Can our light be present in public conversations about family, sexuality, or education in a way that exposes any unfruitful works of darkness for what they are? See, my point in asking these questions is to get us thinking collectively how far and how wide is the need for the children of light to be present, shining the light of Jesus because the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true.

In truth, I can't think of one area of human existence or endeavor that doesn't need such fruit to be present. Because as the proverb says, they do not know over what they stumble.

[29 : 37] We are, by the grace of God, children of light. And we are to have nothing to do with the unfruitful works of darkness. That is, we are not to walk in them or condone them, but rather we are to expose them.

And while this might involve people raised up, John the Baptist-like to stand out in the public corner and decry sin, I think it's more likely, it's more likely that we do it locally and collectively.

If shining light so that it exposes darkness so that darkness might become light is the marker of Crow Road Free Church, it will surely signal that we are a healthy church.

Because it will be a church that humbly pursues what is good and right and true in all areas of life and becomes a place that has something about it that magnetizes, that draws others to the light of Jesus, the light of the world.

May God give us grace to do so. Let's pray. Lord, thank you that you have called us out of darkness and brought us into light. And we thank you, Lord, that the purpose behind that is that you would use your people to continue to shine light in the midst of darkness so that people will indeed be drawn to the light because the light, the fruit of it, is what is good, what is right, and what is true.

[31 : 04] And that's what people not only need, ultimately, it's what they're trying to achieve in everything that they do. So we pray, God, that you would help us, help us to be the kind of light that you want us to be.

You call us children of light and may we indeed walk in that light and may we have the kind of compassion that looks upon those around us who are stumbling in the dark because they don't even know what's going on, where they're going, what's happening.

May we, with humility and compassion, shine the light from here, from Crow Road Free Church, individually in our lives, collectively as a congregation, and comprehensively addressing all of what it means to be a human being living in the light and not in the darkness.

This I pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thank you.