

God's Holy People: Light in Darkness

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Date: 20 July 2025

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[0 : 00] You should find an outline as well tonight in the insert, which is actually going to be quite useful tonight,! But one of the very effective persuasion techniques that marketing agencies and what not use is the before and after method.

Right? So for example, take this slide of makeovers. Bit too dark for you. Probably best, no, no, just say that, not that, yep.

There's the before of the kitchen, which, you know, best not to be seen. And then there's the after of the kitchen. Then there's the weight loss program, like the Man Shake.

I can't see any of you being on this program. But the before and the after to persuade you that this product is actually good. And the one that keeps popping up on my feed is, I don't know why, Advanced Hair Studio.

Well, as I said before, Paul actually in his letter is doing a very similar thing in Ephesians. He has in the first three chapters detailed to us God's master plan, shown us the blessings of those who are in Christ.

[1 : 37] And then afterwards, from chapter four onwards, he's been painting the picture of the before and the after. Teaching us how to live in Christ, which is the after.

But then also showing us how we used to be, that is the before. So before we actually look into our passage today, I want to just recap the flow of the logic of Paul's letter from chapter four.

And so you can see on the outline, the recap number one. In chapter four, verse one, Paul began by urging us to live a life worthy of our calling that's now in Christ. Okay, that's the after.

In fact, the word there translated live is more literally to walk. And so I've got the Christian standard version, Christian standard Bible version of this verse up on the slide, which shows the word walk, to walk worthy of the calling, not live worthy of the calling.

It's the same with the ESV. And walk conveys a sense of journey, isn't it? We're heading towards a glorious future instead of living, which can sometimes feel like it's static.

[2 : 45] So live, walk, they're sort of similar, but the word in Greek is actually walk. Then in verses one to 16 of that chapter, we're instructed on how to walk together as Christ's body, united and mature, building one another up in truth and love.

Then, two weeks ago in verse 17, we encountered the second use of the word walk. This time, it's used negatively to paint the picture of the before.

Don't walk as the Gentiles do, which is what Ephesians used to before Christ. So that's on the next slide. That was a life marked by futile thinking, Paul says.

A corrupt mindset, which resulted in godless living. Instead, Paul warned them to put off the old self. Take it off. And we saw a lot of examples of what that means in terms of behaviour.

And these were in verses about 25 to chapter 5 and verse 7. Instead, Paul says, put on the new self, which again, we spent some time looking at as to what that all meant.

[4:00] And then in chapter 5 and verse 2, there's actually another reference there to walking. So on the next slide, walk in love, because that's just like God, who forgave us and sent his son Jesus, who loved and gave himself up for us as well.

And then I finished off last week by saying that Paul then warned us clearly that there are only two ways to live. Before and after. Live in Christ, that's the after, and inherit God's kingdom.

Or go back to living in disobedience, that's the before, and end up facing God's wrath. And that brings us to our passage today, verse 8, where Paul continues with the same before and after pattern, only this time with a twist.

And he gives us two new images to consider. The first, and you can see the second heading, is in verses 8 to 14, is that between light and darkness.

And the second, in verses 15 to 20, which is the point 3, is the image of wine versus spirit. So let's begin with verse 8, where we read, For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

[5:17] Live as light, for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth, and find out what pleases the Lord. Now, I've come back to the NIV there, which says live as children of light, but that again, literally is walk as children of light, not darkness.

Now, Paul had previously spoken of the Gentiles' darkened understanding, that was chapter 4, verse 18. But here he goes a bit further, because he's not just saying that they don't live in darkness any longer, they are saying they were once darkness itself.

And conversely, they are now light. Not just living in light, but they are now light. Now, of course, they can only be light because they are in the light.

And as children of the light, God has given them new birth into light. But the idea of light being light is such that it's not just light that is now shining on them, but they themselves have to shine forth as light as well.

And so, if we are truly light, then it follows that our lives needs to be consistent with our nature, our new nature. We can't help, almost, but live as light.

[6:36] And so, Paul says, displaying the fruit of light, which is goodness, righteousness, and truth. Now, these things we've already covered over the last few weeks, so we're not going to go into the specifics again.

But these are the things that please the Lord, because the Lord Himself is light. These are things that He is, goodness, righteousness, and truth. So, Paul says, find out what these things are in practice, and then go and do them, which he talked about in the previous weeks.

Conversely, on the opposite side, verse 11, have nothing to do with fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret.

So, again, we see the contrast, isn't it, of light and darkness. It's the fruit of light versus the fruitless deeds of darkness.

And although Paul doesn't say so again here, there are things that we looked at the last time. Sexual immorality, greed, all forms of bitterness and rage. And they are fruitless because they amount to nothing.

[7:45] They are waste. Nothing good comes out of them. So, as you can see, as Paul has continued, there is still a clear sense, isn't it, just as it was last week, that the old and the new, the before and the after, the light and the darkness are distinct and separate.

Right? Keep them apart. Don't try, as a Christian, to straddle both worlds and do a bit of this and do a bit of that. No, you can't. Either you are fully in the light or you are fully in the dark.

And yet, Paul now also says that as light, that's us, we have a role to interact with darkness. Not to practice the fruitless deeds, but to expose the deeds of darkness.

And here, the idea is not that we go on a witch hunt, you know, go and dig up dirt of people who don't believe in Jesus and denounce them. Yes, there's a place for holding wrongdoers to account, but the idea here is not about that.

We're not to channel an energy to try and sort of criticize and pick apart other people. Instead, the picture here is that as we live as children of light, our lives will naturally shine in the darkness and therefore expose it.

[9 : 04] Because that's how light is anyway, isn't it? We've just turned on the lights in this hole because we want to dispel the darkness that is in this hole so we can see. So likewise, our lives, when they are lived in light, will be transparent, will be visible to all.

Now, that's again not to say that we walk around like showing off and say, look, look how much light I have, how righteous I am. Because Jesus condemns, doesn't he, the Pharisees for doing that, being self-righteous.

Rather, it's the idea that when we are light, it's not possible to blend with the darkness. People can see clearly that this is light and here is darkness.

Here is people who live because of Jesus and here are people who live without Jesus. Our lives of truth and righteousness will be distinctive.

And think about it, when we walk around and we are forgiving of others, not holding grudges, being gracious, acting selflessly.

[10 : 10] These are not the norms in the world, right? You just need to go into your workplace. And what is the norm? Selfish behaviour, isn't it? People thinking about themselves, how they can get ahead for themselves, greed, anger, rage.

And so when people experience grace from us, us acting selflessly, it will put their own motives and actions into sharp relief.

They will begin to notice and then wonder, ask questions. Now, Paul also talks here about things done in secret. And I think some of it is a reference to the types of impurities that go on behind closed doors or on the internet.

But I also think that they refer to the secrets in the hearts of humans. Things that nobody else knows. Hidden motives like jealousy, envy, anger, lust.

These are the secrets that will be exposed as well. And so we read on in verse 13, Now, this verse here is actually very compact.

[11 : 33] And it's a bit hard to try and understand exactly what it's saying. But Paul, I think, is saying with the first sentence what I've been referring to. That is, as we live as children of light, the lives of others are exposed by what we say and do.

God's Spirit uses our lives to convict them of their own. Because they may start asking, Why are Christians so joyful even when they suffer? Why are they good?

Why do they do good even when it's not returned? When it's being taken advantage of? And why can't I be like them? These are the questions that they will begin to ask about their own lives and then eventually expose the futility of how they are living.

Now, of course, not everyone responds positively. That's okay. But for those who do, Paul says, They are then illuminated themselves.

That's the second sentence. They believe in Jesus. They yield to the Spirit, just as we did ourselves some time back. And in turn then, go from being darkness to light.

[12 : 44] And this whole process then, I think, is summarized as that quote, which is on the screen still, in verse 14. Wake up, sleeper. Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.

That's the process of conversion, isn't it? Of becoming a Christian. Now, people have wondered, because this quote is a bit tricky. Paul says, it is said.

So he's obviously quoting from somewhere. And it is probably reasonable to expect that Ephesians knew where he was quoting from. But, unlike what usually occurs, it doesn't appear to be that Paul is quoting from the Old Testament.

You could do a Google search. I've done many searches. But the other thing too is that there is a reference there to Christ, which is not normal to find in an Old Testament text.

So, this is only an educated guess, but many people think then what's happened is that this is really just an excerpt from an early Christian hymn. Something that, you know, we might have been singing.

[13:49] People sing, you know, around in the early church. And they're singing this one line, which Paul has picked out. But, this line here has borrowed imagery from the Old Testament.

And so, if that's the case, the next question becomes, what part of the Old Testament has this line borrowed from? And here, we think that the best bet appears to be that passage that we just read in Isaiah chapter 16.

In fact, before we get to chapter 60, in these other parts of Isaiah, just before in chapter 51 verse 9 and 17, and then in verse 52 as well, you can see the first word there, God's holy city, Jerusalem, is being instructed to awake.

The second part of Isaiah was all about the fact that they have rebelled against God, God has disciplined them, but now are restoring them. And so, they're being asked to awake as part of this restoration to be His witness.

So that, in chapter 60, the instruction becomes, to arise and shine. For your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.

[15:00] So, verse 2, there's darkness over the earth and all the peoples, but not in Zion, because God's glory is shining over it. And as a result, verse 3, nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

And so, this is the exact parallel that happens with God's holy people, the church. Now, once we were darkness, but by His grace and calling, we've been asked to arise and become light, so that we can draw others to the light of Christ.

And so, that's the privilege and the responsibility that we have as God's people, as Christ's body. As we become mature, we become His witnesses, shining for Him as our head.

Now, we do this by proclaiming the good news of Jesus, but we also do this together as we walk in light, as light, in the darkness.

So, Christian community, when we live rightly, is actually a very powerful witness, a beacon of light to the world.

[16:15] And so, Paul now then turns his attention to this in the remaining verses, showing us that when we gather together, what that looks like.

How can we be light as we gather? And so, the second image he uses is that of coming under the influence. Now, I just want to ask how many of you are familiar with this acronym DUI?

Some of you have it on your infringement notice from Vic Paul. Hopefully not. But it stands for driving under the influence, right? DUI. You don't want to have it on your thing, under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Not good.

But here in verses 15 to 20, Paul instructs us not to come under the influence of alcohol, but rather to come under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Alright? So, he first says though, in verse 15, Be careful then how you live, not as unwise, but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

[17:27] And here that word live is again, walk, so the fifth use of that word. But the instructions that are about to follow are given because Paul wants them to know the times in which we live.

Be wise, Paul says, because we're living in the end times. And that is when the days are evil and godlessness abounds.

We may look out and see, oh, you know, modern life is getting better all the time. But no, Paul says, no, the days are actually evil. And the time is short.

So, Paul says, use it carefully. Don't be unwise. Don't waste it on empty pursuits. But use every opportunity to shine as light so that you can draw others to Christ.

So, all this is being said with a sense of urgency as to what we do each Sunday. It's like when you have a work deadline or an essay due. You know, no more wasting your time, right?

[18:30] If the assignment is due at midnight, no more sleeping in. No more watching TikTok. No more playing, you know, Xbox, right? It's time to focus and prioritize.

Every minute is precious. And that's the sense here for Paul. So, he says in verse 17, Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

Now, we already know what the Lord's will is. He said it in Ephesians 1, verse 10. God's will, God's master plan is to bring all things to unity under Christ. We know His will.

But as a Christian, as a church, we need to understand what that means practically, so that we can put our energies into doing those things to fulfill God's will.

Hence, the image of drunkenness. Because drunkenness is really a picture of the ultimate waste of time. It leads absolutely nowhere compared to being filled with the Spirit.

[19:33] Verse 18, Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Now, all drunkenness does result in debauchery, right?

Sex, violence, and all sorts of stupid behavior. You know, people will wake up the day after, hung over, and they always regret what they've done because they were drunk. And so much of our society's problem, if you look at the TV or whatever, can be traced back to alcohol as an accelerant, making things worse.

Drunk driving, domestic violence, aggravated assault, petty crimes. All these things, you know, has alcohol a lot of times as part of the thing that made it happen.

So, Paul says, don't follow the world into these wild and drunken orgies. But instead, if you choose to be drunk, so to speak, be drunk on the Holy Spirit.

Be drunk on the Holy Spirit. Not that when you're drunk on the Spirit, you spin out of control as a result, but rather, when you are filled with the Spirit, we will become self-controlled, actually.

[20:43] Purposeful. But under his influence, what we will do with our lives is not debauchery, but will lead to unadulterated joy and thanksgiving.

And when that happens, Paul then explicitly names the four outcomes of being filled with the Spirit. Now, I don't think it's exhaustive, but they are the mark of Spirit-filled living.

And here's where I want you to have a look at that outline. I do have a fourth, actually. The fourth is actually in verse 21, which we'll mention briefly today, but we'll actually need to focus on it for the next three Sundays, because that's where Paul goes.

But I've set up in the outline exactly how the sentence is actually structured in these verses by Paul. Paul, and what is there actually is that there is only one main verb, and that is to be filled with the Spirit.

That is the main instruction, be filled with the Spirit. All the others are, as it were, participles or continuous tense, kind of consequential actions that flow from this main verb of being filled with the Spirit.

[21:53] And so he says, when we are filled with the Spirit, verse 19, what will happen is, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit. Number one.

Number two, I've combined those. It's making music, or singing and making music from your heart to the Lord.

The NIV has just sing and make music, but actually it's singing and making music. Again, not an imperative, but a participle. Third, giving thanks to God, the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And then fourthly, which is verse 21, not on the slide, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. And again, verse 21, even though it says submit, it is actually in the continuous submitting to one another.

And so you can see from that structure that all those things are actually grouped together, isn't it? Because the first and the last are paired as things done to one another. The two in the middle are things directed to the Lord, or God.

[22:59] Of the four, submitting seems to be a little different from the other three, because it relates more to relating, relationships, whereas the first three are more speech related.

So, that's why we're going to just focus on and concentrate on the first three this week. Because they inform our conduct when we gather. And you can see that, isn't it?

Now, we don't just gather on the Sunday, but a large part of our gathering is the Sunday gathering, isn't it? Where everyone is together. So, with that, what can I offer you in terms of what we can take away from these verses?

To affirm, but also to shape what we're doing on a Sunday. Now, first, I think it's worth noticing that when we sing, we're both speaking to one another.

Can you see that? But also, making music to the Lord. We're doing two things at the same time. It's not mutually exclusive. We're speaking to one another because we're teaching and building one another up.

[24:05] With the truth about God and His Son, Jesus. We're being encouraged and formed as we sing to one another. Did you realize that when you're singing? That you're actually encouraging other people and building them up.

At the same time, we're also giving thanks to the Lord, Paul says. Singing and making music with our hearts to Him. And so, singing is not just encouragement.

It's also worship. Right? Now, incidentally, I think there are other parts of our service, like our public, corporate kind of prayers and saying the creed together. That's also similar, isn't it?

That when we do these things, they are spoken to one another to encourage, but they're also spoken to God. Now, while we're on this topic, let me get on a bit of a hobby horse.

And that is to say that worship is not just confined to singing. That's why, and I keep telling the music team, they are called the music team, not the worship team.

[25:10] Okay? Because the band is not the only ones worshipping, and they are not the only people leading the worship. Everything that happens, the entire service, is an act of worship.

Indeed, in Romans chapter 12, Paul says that all our lives are lived in worship to God. So, yes, we worship when we sing, but it's not only in song that we worship God.

We need to worship God every moment that we're together, corporately. That's corporate worship. And then when we live our lives, that's sort of individual worship. Second, don't read Paul's words here and think that only the songs are from the Spirit.

Right? Some people are saying, oh, the hymns and the psalms. No, but the songs, they're so spiritual. No, the psalms, the hymns, and the songs are all inspired by the Spirit.

And so, one is not, therefore, better than the other. And so we try and sing a variety. If anything, if you want to push me on this, I would say then that the psalms have to be the most superior, right?

[26 : 22] Because they are part of God's Word. Hymns and songs, you know, they're made up, not in the Bible. But no, Paul's not saying that at all. Paul's saying they are all songs, music, hymns from the Spirit, inspired by the Spirit.

Now, I think Paul is not, you know, I doubt if Paul is trying to divide the hymns, psalms, and songs in this way anyway. That's not how they would used to think.

This is a very modern way of reading into psalms, hymns, and songs. Instead, I think he was just saying, you know, he's just using words to cover the range of music that's being used at church.

And he's saying, whatever they are, all of them are edifying, and so it shouldn't matter what we sing, provided they are rich in God's truth.

So we don't sing rubbish, we sing songs, hymns, and psalms that are true to God's Word. Because that's what the Spirit does. The Spirit uses God's Word to work in us.

[27 : 27] And that's the other thing that I often hear. Oh, this is of the Word, and this is of the Spirit. No, do not divorce the Spirit and the Word. The Spirit works through God's Word.

Alright, so when you hear people say that, don't buy into that. Oh, this is so, too much Word. Not enough Spirit. The Spirit uses the Word.

And you can read the Bible and look through it, and you will see that that's true. So, I know some of us like hymns, maybe not too many here. Others like modern songs. But we ought to sing all of them.

In fact, the old hymns of today were once modern songs of yesterday. Right? Got to be. They are simply songs that have stood the test of time.

So actually, we have confidence to sing them. Likewise, for those of you who like hymns, some songs we sing today will become the hymns of tomorrow, provided they stand the test of time.

[28 : 28] And, you know, if I put my money on it, I would say a song like, In Christ Alone, How Deep the Father's Love, I think will be among them.

Alright? Next time when you're 90 years old and I'm long gone, you can tell me whether I'm right or not. And the Geddes, Keith and Kristen Geddes of today, will be to us the Charles Wesley, sorry, the Geddes of the future generations, they will be looked back on like the Charles Wesleys of today.

Right? So, God is at work all the time creating new songs. And we need to embrace it. Sing the old, sing the new. And the other thing while I'm at it, is I really want to encourage all of you, and I want to thank all your parents that made you study music, play the piano, guitar, whatever.

We need musicians. So, please, don't give up on it if you're still learning it. And next time when you have children and you can afford it, bring them to learn the piano and the guitar and whatever.

Pay for their music lessons so that they can come serve the church. Because the third thing is, Paul does highlight, doesn't he, just how important singing is. Right?

[29 : 43] But it's singing together. It's singing to one another. So, yes, you can sing in your own bedroom, listening to Spotify.

But it's not the same as coming to church and singing together to one another. And it's not just the band singing to the congregation. What the band does is to lead all of us to sing.

And although I have to say, I'm not trying to make one better than the other, singing together is slightly different to even me standing up here and preaching the truth.

Because singing allows all of us to declare God's truth in unity and in unison. Which is not what you're doing right now.

You're just hearing me tell you what to, you know, learn and believe. When we sing, we're actually declaring as one body, in one voice, the eternal truths about God and his marvelous acts.

[30 : 47] That's what we're doing together. And we're not just singing to those on earth that might come in and visit us. Bless you if you've come in tonight. We are also singing to the heavenly realms.

We're singing to the angels and the demons and all the spiritual powers. That this, as a church, is what we believe to be true of our God.

That we hold dearly to these truths when we sing it. That's a public form of witness to the cosmos. Even as we do it together as well.

And unlike, you know, corporate liturgy and saying the creed together and all that, music and song has a way, doesn't it, of not just engaging the mind, but also the emotions.

Right? And you know, because you want to go for concerts more than you want to come and listen to sermons. And that's why Paul says, make music with your hearts.

[31 : 48] Music allows us to not just think the truth, but feel the truth. And God has given us emotions as a gift so that we can feel the truth.

Now, of course, we can sing mindlessly too. That's not the point. But when it's done rightly, the tempo, the meter, the melody, somehow has this ability to stir up something deep in our souls.

That words alone may not do. So I don't know whether you know this hymn. I think we've sung it before here. But a hymn like, It is well with my soul. Right?

Every time we sing it, somehow it just resonates. People sing somehow much better. I don't know why. Not that the other songs are bad. But there's something about the tempo, the pitch.

And by the way, we can't sing that song too quick, right? It's just wrong. It is well with my soul. You've got to sing it slowly, right? As it comes out, the melody helps us to identify with what is being described.

[32 : 56] When peace like a river attendeth my way. You can sing along if you want. When sorrows like sea billows roll.

Right? You want to keep singing. I'm going to stop. Because it's not just the truth that we're singing, but it's the truth as it speaks into the experiences of our life.

When truth meets our life. And it helps us not just to hear God's word, but to say, yes, this is true in my life as well.

And so it affirms both the mind and the heart. And that's what we do when we sing. Now, one more thing. It means, therefore, that we don't just sing happy, clappy songs, right?

We can sing happy, clappy songs, but don't just sing them. In fact, Paul says that we are to sing the Psalms. Which if you look at the Psalms, one third of the Psalms are actually laments.

[34 : 00] So, we need to sing and give thanks for everything, in all circumstances, across our full range of human experiences.

Sing of the good times and the bad times. Sing when we are suffering, and sing when we are in triumph. So, this is the picture of the Christian life, really.

That as members of Christ's body, we're called to live holy and righteous lives. And so here we are, out in the world during the week, living as light. But things can get tough, right?

We can get discouraged. We can get persecuted, even. And so the idea is that we need to gather each Sunday, as light in the darkness, to declare again the truth of the Gospel, firstly to one another.

And then, to overflow with praise and thanksgiving to God, as a witness to the watching world, even the cosmos.

[35 : 04] Because, as we gather, we allow God's work by His Spirit in us to overflow into praise and thanksgiving for all that He's been doing, and all that He will do in our lives.

And so, even if you have a difficult week, you should come anyway. Because that's how you're going to let the body of Christ minister to you, speak to you in song, in word and song, so that you can be encouraged, strengthened, to go out and face the coming week.

You know, you've got a flickering light, maybe. Let it be boosted by the encouragement of Christ's body in word and song, so that you can head out back into the darkness as light for Christ.