

## BIBLE BACKGROUND

### Ephesians 5:8-20

#### Verses 8-10

**At one time you were darkness and now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light – for the fruit of light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth – thinking of what is pleasing to the Lord.**

In this extended paranesis beginning at chapter four, Paul comments on the Ephesians' Gentile background (see 2:11-13). Interestingly he does not say they lived in darkness but he says, **you were darkness and now you are light in the Lord** ἦτε ... σκότος ... φως ἐν κυρίῳ. He is thinking that unbelievers create the darkness and add to its totality just as those who are enlightened by the gospel, are the Lord's light in the world (Matt 5:14). God has **transferred us from the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of the Son he loves** (Colossians 1:13). Thus, there are two possible states for each person: to be light or to be darkness. Paul goes further and says that without Christ, the people themselves constitute the darkness. They are the evil that darkness consists of.

The image of light and darkness is ubiquitous in the Bible and is a natural description of our situation. If we were once darkness, because of Christ we **are now light in the Lord**. God's kingdom is essentially the people in it. Christ himself said we are **the light of the world** (Matt. 5:14). We are light; our constitution has changed by faith in Christ. We are different in ourselves. Hence Paul goes on to speak of our identity as **children of light**. This is like saying children of God. Since a profound change has occurred by the power and grace of God in Christ then we are exhorted to live up to what we now are, or literally, walk as children of light.

Since our beings have changed, Paul exhorts children to think and act according to the new natures they have been given. A brief summary is supplied: **goodness, righteousness and truth**. More detailed instruction is found in verses preceding and following this periscope. Tripartite expressions were favoured by Paul e.g. 1Cor 13:13. Technically, light does not produce fruit; it shines and radiates. But the beams of light can be summarized in this way. Can we force these fruit into a Trinitarian description? The Father expresses his goodness in creation, the Son brings the righteousness of God and the Spirit leads us into true faith? But the word **all** indicates that all that is true, good, and right is what is meant here in the manner of Phil 4:8ff.

The last phrase is again typical of Paul: **thinking of what is pleasing to the Lord** (Rom 12:1; 2Cor 5:9 et al). Paul urges the listeners to not only be occupied with the Lord's will but actually discover what it is. New Christians may not know his will all at once but begin to learn what it is over time and through experiences become more aware of its significance and effectiveness (5:17; Col 1:9). The Christian's business in life is to be always considering how he or she might **please the Lord**. The life of darkness used to mean thinking of what pleases oneself; now the believer is to put the Lord first in his or her thinking (Rom. 12:2,3).

#### Verses 11-14

**Have nothing to do with the fruitless works of darkness but rather expose them. The things done in secret by them are too shameful to even speak about. All those things exposed by the light become visible for the light makes all things visible. Therefore, it says,**

**Sleeper, wake up!  
Rise from the dead  
and Christ will shine on you.**

Paul exhorts Christians to not be associated or **be joined** with others in evil deeds (verse 7 and see 2Cor. 6:14). The verb literally means **to have fellowship with** συγκαινωνεῖτε something. He describes the works of darkness as **fruitless** ἀκάρπτοις, for they do not fit with God's design for the world and therefore lead to futility and death (Rom 6:16,21). We can think of drunkenness or

sexual immorality (5:3), which requires on going excessive activity that never satisfies, for only Jesus can give **living water** and a state of not thirsting (John 4:10,14). Fruitless deeds are sterile; they do not lead to growth or life but rather moral decay and spiritual death. In this chapter Paul mention immorality (19), lying (25), uncontrolled anger (26), holding a grudge (26), stealing (28), unwholesome talk (29), brawling (31), malice and slander (31). On the other hand, love, gentleness, patience, humility, serving the church, prayerfulness, speaking the truth, forgiving, encouraging conversation, compassion etc leads to a fruitful and God-pleasing life (24, 5:1).

Paul also has in mind disgusting activity **too shameful to mention**, which he does in fact state in Romans 1:24-27.

But he returns instead to the theme of **light** as an image of judgement and exposure by God. God does not have to condemn the evil of darkness but only needs to put alongside it the goodness, righteousness and truth of his Son and his people. The pure, loving actions of Christians **expose** the darkened deeds of others. The Christian message in the context of darkness is always a call to repentance. As our culture becomes satiated with evil (Myer and David Jones are now using male models to market clothing to homosexuals) the relevance of law and gospel becomes greater. It is obvious that when the light goes on or the sun rises, things **become visible**. So, all the evil will be forced out of hiding and secret places before the glory of Christ, who is the light (Jn 8:12).

Paul uses a Christian song from early Christian worship to describe how God is calling people out of darkness. Or is it a song that celebrates the Christian's victory over the forces of death (sleep) through the power of Christ's resurrection sung at baptism? In the context of early Christian mission and frequent conversion, the two would go together. The latter may be its intention but Paul could be using it in the former sense here. The song is the promise to the repentant that **Christ will shine on you** επιφάνσει σοι, that is, will give his salvation to you.

Verses 15-20

**Watch carefully how you live, not as unwise people but wise people, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. Because of this, do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk on wine; it leads to debauchery. Rather, be filled by the Spirit, speaking to each other with psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs. In your hearts, sing and delight in the Lord, always giving thanks for everything through our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.**

**Watch carefully how you live or literally, how you walk. Walk** περιπατεῖτε is a Hebraism; it refers to how Christians conduct themselves in an un-churched world. To watch is to be fully alert and aware of what is happening around oneself, in the culture and how those close by may affect you. Paul's reference to **acting as wise people** has to do with how the Christian uses the present time, to not only live a holy life and not joining in the evil around him but in using the time to promote the gospel to those not yet saved (Col 4:5). **Wise and unwise** or **foolish** σοφοί and σοφοί is the topic of Proverbs and in the spirit of this book, Paul Christianises secular reasoning. This is **to make most of the time**. In our era, Christians often think of time stretching into the future forever but in the early church, the coming of our Lord was keenly anticipated and expected shortly. The verb for this action literally means **to buy back the time** εξαγοραζόμενοι. Having pawned the time before coming to Christ, Christians can now buy it back or redeem the time by disassociating themselves from **evil times** (Gal 1:4) and using the present time for the work of Christ.

Hence, Paul then goes on to say, **understand what the will of the Lord is. A foolish** ἀφρονες person ignores the moment and lives only for self or for evil; ignorant (the meaning behind foolishness) of the critical nature of the time and ignorant of the Father's plan and the direction history is taking. The Christian can act as a wise person because he knows **what the will of the Lord is**. Rather than see **will** here in the narrow sense of what behaviour the Lord desires of his people, **will** should be seen as the direction the Lord is taking this world and its inhabitants, that is, towards heaven through his saving grace in Christ's redemption. His will is that all people

avoid his wrath. Even hell, the just judgement on human evil, is still part of his will. The Christian's chief concern is the redemption of the lives around him. A godly, Christ-like life is the Father's will for his children. The Christian lives with purpose, developing holiness and growing up into Christ. Witness has been mentioned but worship, fellowship, and service can also be added. In addition, work, family, friendships, recreation and marriage are to be dedicated to him in faith and through thanks-giving.

Paul specifies the evils of his time: **drunkenness**. It leads to debauchery, to a dissipated state when uncontrolled, shameless behaviour occurs. Rather than immoral or reckless behaviour under the influence of mind-altering drugs such as illicit drugs and alcohol, Christians should gain a high from being **filled by the Spirit**, which leads to joyful, song-filled activity amongst God's children. True happiness and merriness comes from **the heart**, which overflows with **delight in the Lord**. **Delight** ψάλλοντες, associated with the idea of playing, is a lovely expression. True revelry should be reveling in the joy of the Lord, of his love, support and presence in our lives. When Christians are close to their Lord and in their hearts they are delighting in him, then every good gift is traced back to God, is an expression of the first and greatest mercy received from Christ. The result is a profound sense of being blessed and instead of complaints, thankfulness for his love expressed in so many different ways.