

# “You Are Light in the Lord”

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November 22, 2009

Read Ephesians 5:7-14

I do not believe Paul is confusing, but I must admit that I often struggle with what Paul is saying. I believe I am in good company when I read Peter’s commentary on Paul’s thoughts.

<sup>15</sup> “and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, <sup>16</sup> as also in all his letters, **speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand**, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction” (2 Pet. 3:15, 16).

My struggle is in knowing who Paul’s targeted audience is when he speaks of those who **are dark**. He is not saying they act like the dark, but are in actuality dark. Their work or fruit is dark because the tree is dark. The dark tree produces the dark fruit and those who are dark are the sons of disobedience. This principle is clearly stated in Matthew 7:15-20.

<sup>15</sup> “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. <sup>16</sup> You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? <sup>17</sup> So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup> A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. <sup>19</sup> Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup> So then, you will know them by their fruits” (Matt. 7:15-20).

Those who are dark are the objects of God’s wrath (5:6). Those who are dark will not inherit the kingdom of Christ and God (5:5). For Paul to describe the believers who are light in this manner would seem to be out of character for the paragraph itself. Yet there are those who act dark even though they are light. Is this paragraph depicting them? First, I am not convinced from the text that the primary authorial intent is directed at erring brothers in Christ. I am convinced that the primary meaning is our response as the children of light toward those who are still in darkness. Second, even though authorial intent is singular, I do believe the application of the text can be varied. It must, however, be anchored in the original meaning. With this qualifier, I believe we can say that those who are light need to guard against and interact cautiously with those who are marked by darkness even though they are light.

Part of our struggle is the ongoing experience we, who *are* light, have with the darkness that marks our own existence. Does this mean **we are dark**? I do not believe so. The language in our text speaks of something that now characterizes our way of life. The Bible speaks to this as “practice.”

“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**” (Eph. 5:5).

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“envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that **those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God**” (Gal. 5:21).

<sup>4</sup> “Everyone who **practices** sin also **practices** lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. <sup>5</sup> You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. <sup>6</sup> No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. <sup>7</sup> Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who **practices** righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; <sup>8</sup> the one who **practices** sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. <sup>9</sup> No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. <sup>10</sup> By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother” (1 John 3:4-10).

Whatever else we might conclude concerning this, we can safely say that no one who is born of God and is now a child of light practices sin. This does not mean sin is not still present or manifested, but it does mean that as a believer I do not **practice sin**. At this point, we must be emphatic because the text warrants such an emphasis. So how does this translate into our current text? Those who practice darkness are dark. Those who practice light are light. The practice of light is a consequence or fruit of being **in Light** (i.e. in Christ). Those who practice darkness do so because they **are dark**. Believers will never be dark simply because they **are light**. Can believers manifest the characteristics of the dark? Absolutely, but I can never be what I once was. The primary meaning of this text does not speak to “dark” believers. It only speaks to those who **are dark** and the response of those who **are light** toward them. May we as children of light continue to follow the Light, and may we by our conduct and communication expose the dark to the light so that they might become light. In Jesus name, Amen.

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