

Christians Who Glow in the Dark

Ephesians 5:8-14

Korean scientists have developed a cat that glows in the dark—they say it's for “genetic research.” Deep in the sea there are creatures which have been created by God to emit light from their bodies. There is even a fish called the “flashlight fish,” which has a luminescent organ on its head just below the eyes. It can turn its light off and on at will, presumably to attract or blind its food. And of course, we're all familiar with lightning bugs, or fireflies, whose little bodies produce a chemical reaction which causes a small light to emit from its abdomen.

There are many other things which have been man-made to glow in the dark: watches, pajamas, stars that stick onto the ceiling, and various toys, just to name a few. Unlike the creatures deep in the sea, and the fireflies, those man-made novelties require exposure to a light source before they can actually glow in the dark. The stronger the light, the closer the object is to the light, and the longer it is exposed to the light, the brighter the object will glow.

What an obvious parallel between those things which glow in the dark, and us as believers! We are surrounded by darkness on every side, and yet we are told by Jesus Himself in Matthew 5:14 that we are the light of the world. Jesus also said in John 8:12, *“I am the light of the world [referring to Himself, of course]. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”* So obviously, our light comes from His light, and the closer we stay to Him, the more we expose our lives to His light, the brighter we shine. Here's a beautiful verse from Psalm 18:28—*“You, O Lord, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light.”*

Many times in the Scriptures we find a stark contrast between light and dark. Isaiah 9:2 was a prophecy of the coming Messiah: *“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”* This was the very verse Matthew used (4:16) at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry to tell us that Jesus was the Messiah. The light from God is what gives us hope. Isaiah 50:10 reads, *“Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the word of his servant? Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God.”*

There are others. Jesus said (John 12:46), *“I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.”* The point is that we are in darkness until we come to know Christ. When Christ, who is the Light, comes into our darkness, our lives are transformed into light also. When Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians, he was trying to convey this very important truth: that once your life has been transformed by Christ, there is such a great contrast between the old life and the new, that it is like the difference between light and dark.

He says first of all that before Christ...

1 We were Darkness, v. 8a

1 “*For you were once darkness...*” Genesis, the very first book of the Bible, begins with these words (I know you’ve heard them before, but listen to them again): Verse one: “*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*” Verse two: “*Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.*” But now hear verse three, as if for the first time: “*And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.*” Did you hear those words? Pay attention to three very important things.

First, there has always been a contrast between darkness and light. The concepts are introduced in the first three verses of the Bible. It is a contrast, even a struggle, which continues to this very day, both physically as well as spiritually. I am not saying that the Creation account in Genesis was an allegory—hear what I am saying: God, in His omnipotence, merely spoke the words, and it all came to be. But there is a sharp parallel between what happened at Creation, and what happens in our lives spiritually. Paul is saying here in Ephesians that there is a difference between light and dark, a fact which should be obvious. When we apply this truth to our lives as followers of Jesus, it should be just as obvious: there should be a marked difference between our lives, as children of the Light, and those who are still in the darkness of unbelief. 2 Corinthians 4:6 reads, “*For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God.*”

Second, the first words of God in the Bible are “Let there be light.” He didn’t address the darkness, or the emptiness or the chaos. He simply spoke the light into existence, and it happened. The fact that these are the very first words of God recorded in the Bible should say something to us about their importance. Not that God needed light, but in His wisdom He chose to create light first. It is no coincidence! The spiritual parallel there is that the entrance of light is the first thing that happens in our lives when we step toward Christ. Christ comes in, and brings Light. The darkness is dispelled, and in its place is glorious light and fellowship with Jesus!

Third, darkness is what you have until God speaks! Darkness reigns over the first two verses of the Bible, but when God speaks there is such an abundance of light that He had to divide it into a greater light for the day, and a lesser light to govern the night (Genesis 1:16). The same thing is true in the lives of human beings. There are those who stumble along in the darkness of their own making, without Christ and without hope. Darkness is what they have, and what they will always have, until they hear God speaking light into their darkness. God speaks to each of us at the moment of salvation, and says, “Let there be light!” He said it to me, and He said it to

you already if you have accepted the gift of salvation He offers you. And if you have not accepted Christ as your personal Savior, the Good News today is that you can indeed hear God the Creator speaking light into your darkness.

Paul says *“For you were once darkness.”* Notice that he did not say that we were just IN the dark, but that we were an actual part of it. We were darkness itself. He’s not trying to get us to dwell on the past—he’s just reminding us that it *is* the past! Remember what it was like: *“For you were once darkness.”* If we could remember what life was like without Christ, how empty and vain and meaningless it was, we would spare ourselves a lot of heartache and trouble. We would remember how great was the deliverance that came to us when we came to know Jesus. If we could remember how dark it was before we knew Him, we would make sure that we stay in the Light.

This is not the first time Paul has introduced darkness as a spiritual condition. In 4:18, he had written, *“They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.”* He did a pretty good job of describing their spiritual condition as darkness, and the characteristics of that darkness. But now he says, “Don’t forget that that’s the way you used to be!”

So before Christ, we were darkness...

2 But Now We are Light, v. 8

“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.” The whole atmosphere of Ephesus was darkness. We’ve already covered what the culture in ancient Ephesus was like: black magic, uncontrollable greed, criminal asylum, sexual immorality in such magnitude that none of us can imagine it. We need to understand something here—there is a **physical reality** and there is a **spiritual reality**. The physical reality consists of the things we can see, hear, touch, smell, taste—things we can hold in our hands. On the other hand, the spiritual reality consists of things that are just as true, even if we can’t see, hear, touch, smell or taste them. This is the realm of faith. The **physical** reality for these early Ephesian Christians was that they were still surrounded by all kinds of impurity and darkness. But Paul was saying to them that the **spiritual reality** was that they were light in the Lord, and they should live like children of Light. He was saying to them, “Don’t be fooled by the things that surround you.”

And that is the message for us today as well. The same thing is true of us. We are surrounded on all sides by all kinds of darkness. Crime is rampant, greed is out of control, sexual immorality is so wide-spread that it almost has taken over our entire world. If we only looked at the way things appear, then we might conclude that the world is such a dark place that no one could ever

have any hope of making a difference. We might conclude that our only option is to just go along with what everyone else is doing, stumbling along in the dark, trying to make it through somehow. That's the *physical reality*. But the *spiritual reality* is that we ARE light in the Lord, and we are to live as children of light.

One writer tells several years ago of going from a 100-watt to a 40-watt family. We have other options now for lighting our homes which are more economical. But when energy became scarce and prices shot up, they decided that they would save some money by dropping from 100-watt to 75-watt bulbs in the house, then to 60-watt, and finally to every lamp in the house operating at a mere economical 40 watts. "It wasn't that hard," he said, "because we didn't make the change all at once. It was a slow, sensible change." But then he said strange things started happening. He'd get dressed to go out to dinner and, sitting in the restaurant, he'd suddenly notice a spot on his slacks. He hadn't noticed it at home and missed it again when he got ready for bed. That happened several times with various slacks and shirts and sport coats until they finally caught on to what he called the "graying of their reality." If he had become comfortable in just enough light to get by but not enough to notice stains, how easy it must be to slowly dim the light of the soul until we can get by – almost – but spots and stains are very visible to those willing to live in the light of God's Word (*Pulpit Digest*, 1-2/89, p. 52).

When the light is dim, it's easy to get things confused. Things many times appear to be something other than what they are. We live in a very dark world, where things many times appear to be something they are not. The psalmist sang in Psalm 36:9, "*For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.*" Paul wrote in Romans 13:12 "*The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.*"

Before Christ, we were darkness, but now we are light...

3 So We Should Find Out What Pleases the Lord, vv. 9-10

That's what verse ten tells us: "*find out what pleases the Lord.*" How do we do that? A good place to begin is in the verse just before, verse nine. Paul tells us that the "*fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth.*" You don't find those things in a life filled with darkness. You only find those kinds of things in a life upon whom the Daystar has dawned, and the Light of the Gospel of Christ has shone.

"*Find out what pleases the Lord.*" One translation (Phillips) put it this way: "*Let your lives be living proofs of the things which please God.*" Test all things by Christ's approval of them. This is the standard given to us—does it please Christ? The standard is not whether or not **other people approve** of it, because they are not the ones to whom we will give account on the Day

of Judgment. **Our own understanding** of things is so limited, so we can't even say that we should merely please ourselves. Our **consciences** may not always be accurate; our ways are not God's ways, the Scriptures tell us, so that can't be our standard for our behavior. The **culture** which surrounds us is darkness, so we should certainly avoid making their standards for right and wrong our standards. He didn't say, "Look around you at the way the world does it, and follow them." **Tradition** is also inadequate as a standard—Paul did not say, "Make sure that you follow the traditions of your parents and grandparents." He didn't say, "Be sure to do this the way your folks did it." None of that. He said, "*Find out what pleases the Lord.*"

Pleasing the Lord is the main way that the command to "Live as children of light" is to be carried out. It means that we apply this standard to every detail of our lives, to every moment, to every decision, to every behavior, to every thought, to every attitude, to every word—"Does this please Christ? Does Christ like what I am doing or saying or thinking? This behavior right now—does it please Christ? These words coming out of my mouth right now—do they please Christ?" The closer we are to the One who said, "*I am the light of the world*" the brighter we shine in this dark world. Just as the glow-in-the-dark toys lose their glow when they have been away from the light, so our effectiveness as lights in the world will fade when we neglect to do the things which please the Lord. If we are going to glow brightly in the dark, we must spend more time in the Light of God.

Becoming a Christian is not so much a matter of *adding* Christ to your life along with everything else, as it is *abandoning* your darkness to find true light in Christ. And when we trust in the work of Jesus Christ, the change He brings to us is not a small thing. It's radical! It is a transformation from death to life, from darkness to light. Paul's words indicate that our calling as Christians should have a fundamental impact on our conduct. We will never be the same again. We should never think or act the same. Our thinking and our behavior after coming to Christ should be compared to the life before Christ as the difference between night and day.

Before Christ, we were darkness, but now we are light, so we should find out what pleases the Lord...

4 So We Can Be Light in the Dark, vv. 11-16

We said earlier that our thinking and our behavior after coming to Christ should be compared to the life before Christ as the difference between night and day. That's true.

But it is also true that there should be such a difference between our thinking and behavior that there is that contrast between us and others who do not know Christ. It's not just *our past* that forms the contrast; it should also be *their present—the way they are living right now!* Paul wrote in v. 11, "*Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.*" He said in v. 12, "The things they do are so disgraceful, I'm not even going to

mention them.” Then he goes on in v. 13 to tell us that “*everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible.*” The Bible is telling us that our lives should be living sermons for all to hear, that every deed, every little action or word or thought has an effect on someone. Someone (Robert Lewis Dabney) a long time ago remarked that “The light of a holy example is the gospel’s main argument.”

Vance Havner, a Southern Baptist evangelist in days gone by, once observed that many times people would ask him questions about living for Christ. He said, “It generally boils down to this with a lot of them - How much like the world can I be and still be a Christian? How much of this world can I enjoy and still go to heaven? How near the precipice can I walk without going over? Instead of asking how much like the Lord can I be and how little like the world, it amounts to this... how much of the world can I incorporate into my program and still get to heaven?”

Havner preached a sermon entitled, “Getting Used to the Dark,” which begins this way:

Some time ago a friend of mine took me to a restaurant where they must have loved darkness rather than light. I stumbled into the dimly-lit cavern, fumbled for a chair, and mumbled that I needed a flashlight in order to read the menu. When the food came, I ate it by faith and not by sight. Gradually, however, I began to make out objects a little more clearly. My host said, “Funny, isn't it, how we get used to the dark?” “Thank you,” I replied, “You have given me a new sermon subject.”

...Strangely enough, man never had more artificial illumination and less true light. Bodily, he walks in unprecedented brilliance, while his soul dwells in unmitigated night. He can release a nuclear glory that out-dazzles the sun, and with it he plans his own destruction. He can put satellites in the sky, and left to himself, he is a wandering star to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.

That’s the opposite of what Scripture tells us in Ephesians 5:11. Our lives should “show by contrast how dreary and futile” (Phillips) other ways of living are. We should make a difference in our world. Our lives are lighthouses, from which there should be beams of heavenly light shining out into a very dark world. We were darkness, but now we are light, so we should find out what pleases the Lord...so we can be light in the dark.

Now listen to these hope-filled, magnificent words: “*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you **out of darkness into his wonderful light.***” (1 Peter 2:9) And put an exclamation point behind that one!

2 Peter 1:19 tells us *“And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”*

Are you paying attention to the light shining in a dark place? Have you abandoned the lifestyle, attitudes, behavior and thoughts of darkness, and embraced the true light which is found only in Christ? It may be just a glimmer or a spark but if you will get close to Jesus the Light, you will find that your own light is brighter.

Are you a live-in-the-dark person, or a glow-in-the-dark Christian?