

“Light and Dark”

Ephesians 5:3-14

August 1, 2010
Pastor John Bronson

Order of Worship for August 1st, 2010 (Communion Sunday)

Pre-service Songs

Welcome and Announcements

Call to Worship: The Apostles’ Creed and Prayer

Songs of Worship:

“Rejoice, the Lord is King”

Song # 370

“He Lives”

Song # 368

“I Stand in Awe”

Song # 80

“Christ Alone”

Overhead

Offering and Offertory

The Lord’s Supper

Preparatory Song:

“Power of the Cross”

Overhead

Invitation and Prayer of Consecration

Dedication and Distribution of the Elements

Message:

“Light and Dark”, (Ephesians 5:3-14)

By Pastor Bronson

Closing Song

“I Have Decided to Follow Jesus”

Song # 602

Parting Word of Grace

Sunday Evening Study: “Signs of the Times”

“Silencing Christians” DVD series

5:30 pm to 7:00 pm

Music Building

“The Prayer Closet”

July 25, 2010

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”
(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying for:

1. **Russel and Sharla Weisner serving in Malaysia:** that the grace of the Lord will empower them for an effective witness amongst Muslims and Hindus, amongst the native Malays commercially active Chinese, that the volunteer teaching team will demonstrate the love of God to the English language students; that they will be joyful in Christ
2. **President Obama:** that the Lord will open his heart to what is good and his mind to what is true; that his understanding will grow beyond the range of his personal experience; that he will love justice & righteousness
3. **Nominating Committee:** that each member will be open to the Spirit’s leading; that the Lord will raise up all the needed leaders for the coming year; that each board will be strengthened for expanded ministry
4. **Military Personnel of the Week: SSG Matthew Basner** (son of Randy and Lou Basner):
5. **College Student of the Week: Emily Finn at San Diego State University** (daughter of Sean and Penny Finn):

The title of today’s message is “Light and Dark”. Last week it was “Light”. We are picking up with the study of Ephesians 5:3-14. I am going to read that section and invite you to follow me as I do so. This is what Paul wrote after having said that Jesus gave himself up as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. That is what we just celebrated [in the Lord’s Supper], the fact that Jesus voluntarily made of Himself a sacrifice for our spiritual well being. Then there is a response looked for from us. This is the response, in addition to personal faith. He says,

“But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not associate 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. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, 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, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.’”

Those familiar with the Old Testament often refer to a portion of Leviticus as “The Holiness Code.” Chapter 19 of Leviticus begins with this statement: *“The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, ‘You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.’”* That is a great chapter to read and I encourage you to read it. That there would be such a chapter in the Old Testament surprises almost no one. We know that the Old Testament was the covenant of the Law and that the purpose of the Law was to help people to know what it meant to be holy and to be holy. We expect that in the context of the Old Testament. However, as indicated in the past few weeks, to find a holiness chapter in the New Testament is often not what people expect, for rules are considered by many to be contrary to grace. The New Testament is, after all, a book about grace, the grace of God and forgiveness that we have been given freely through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. But as we have seen in our study of Ephesians, beginning in chapter 4, that understanding does not go far enough. Ephesians 4-6 is a kind of holiness code for Christians. The instructions that are given here by the apostle Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit are for guiding you and me in holy living, that is, offering guidance as to how we can bring our lives into alignment with the will and character of God. In that respect the opening statement in Leviticus is, again, particularly instructive to us: “You shall be holy as I am holy.” God never changes. That is part of His perfections. It is said of the Lord Jesus Christ that he is the same today, yesterday and forever. So that God would expect His people in the Old Testament to be holy, free of sin, and that He should expect the same in the New is surely no surprise. We know that as creatures we can be like God only in a few ways. We do not have God’s knowledge, we do not have God’s power, we do not transcend time and space in the way that God does, we do not have within ourselves the principle of life so that we are indestructible in that quality and character; but we are able to be holy as God is holy! That is what we are told.

That in fact is an essential goal of the grace of the gospel. You might look back in Ephesians I and take note of verses three to five. In Ephesians 1:3-5, at the very opening when Paul is speaking to the Ephesians and introducing them to and giving them the picture of the salvations that is theirs in Jesus Christ, this is what he said, *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world...”* – and here is this purpose clause – *“...that [or you could read it as in order that, it is interpreted both ways, that is a proper translation] we should be holy and blameless before him.”* If you were to turn to another of the apostles, Peter, and look at 1 Peter 1:14-16, this is what he writes: *“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’”* Peter quotes Leviticus.

Now I am going to give a little bit of review of what we have talked about before. Holiness is first of all a matter of faith. It is faith in what God has done in Christ. That is what we were celebrating this morning [in the Lord’s Supper]. Jesus gave Himself as a perfect sacrifice in payment for the offense of all of our sins against God’s holiness. God’s holiness is at least the perfect purity or consistency of God’s goodness and justice: we offend against these when we sin. By the blood of Christ, we are clean and we are no longer offensive to God. Secondly, holiness is a matter of the obedience of faith. These are the two halves: one is faith believing what God has done in Christ. The other is faith believing that Christ can enable me to obedient. The Christian is not expected to simply talk about Jesus; the Christian in fact is expected to live like Jesus. You might recall what Jesus said to His disciples in John 15:14 (I cited this last week). Jesus said, “*You are My friends. . .*” Then He puts in this little word “if”. “*You are my friends if you do what I command you.*” That is why I have said, by the way, that being holy is also being a friend of God.

In Ephesians 5:5-6 Paul emphasizes that sexual immorality, impurity and covetousness are incompatible with holiness: you cannot be the one and the other at the same time. He makes the point sort of horribly strong when he says, “*You may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.*” As most would expect, the Old Testament has a great deal to say about both sexual immorality and impurity. As a Pharisee Paul would have known virtually everything that was said. May I say that we would be wise to learn. I commend to you a reading of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. As a Christian apostle, however, and writing a considerable time after the first church council and recorded for us in Acts 15, Paul knew that there were various parts of the Old Testament law, and a large section of those laws had to do with ceremonial cleanliness. If you don’t know what I am talking about, it is because you haven’t read Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy; you need to do that to understand what I just said. The Lord Jesus Christ when he came and gave Himself as a sacrifice He satisfied the ceremonial demands of the law and we are now excused from many of those regulations having to do with uncleanness. For the Christian, sexual immorality and uncleanness are largely the same thing at this point, whether in our behavior or in our imagination.

[There are] just a couple of verses I want to cite on sexual immorality. Any specific discussion of sexual immorality would be inappropriate in a large group setting. I have no intention of engaging in such a thing. But I do think it is right for us to understand how the scriptures evaluate this; [what is] their perspective on the seriousness or the depth of the corruption that results in our lives when we let ourselves become corrupted in a sexual manner. In 2 Timothy 2:22 Paul gives this advice to his own son in the faith. He says, “*Flee*” – or run away from – *youthful passions and pursue [instead] righteousness, faith, love and peace along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.*” But it is really in 2 Corinthians 6:18-19 that Paul is most specific about sexual immorality and its consequences. This is what he says, “*Flee* – again it is “*run away*” – *from sexual immorality. . .*” Let me give you a practical application. When one of those images comes up on your computer monitor, what do you do? You run away. You do not linger. You do not wait a half second. You instantly run away. I have told you before I am extremely sensitive to visual stimulation. Often times when I am in the mall I walk along and what do I have to do? I walk along and “Wham”; I don’t care who notices me, and I don’t care if I walk into somebody; I am not going to let the temptation play upon my mind. I will run away. That is what Paul says. “*Flee from sexual immorality. . .*” Now he tells us why. “*. . .for every other sin a person commits is outside the body. But the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.*” Then he tells them why this is so critically important: the believer’s body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. There is not an ordinary person in this room unless someone in this room is not a believer. Every single person who is a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ has received the Holy Spirit. You are a walking temple. So, run, run away.

Moving on, in verse 5, Paul equates covetousness with idolatry. To covet is not to desire something strongly: we oftentimes use the word that way. Actually it is to intensely desire something that someone else already has. It is to envy. Webster’s Dictionary puts it this way: “covet: to desire ardently (especially, something that another person has); to crave; long for.” You don’t want the same kind of thing; you want the same thing itself. Paul names this idolatry. Although not universally, yet still characteristically the pagan worshiper sought to gain access to and possession of the power of the god he worshipped. He wanted to participate in and experience what that god experienced. Lloyd-Jones’ commentary defines

covetousness more familiarly as “. . . avarice, love of money; love of money as money; love of money partly for itself and partly because of what it can do for us, the things we can buy with money. . . the things we can do if we have got money. . .” His definition makes sense to us for we live in a day when we think that money can buy us everything that is necessary for a full life. The United States is mad for money. We can easily envy and resent the rich. This is idolatry.

Envy and resentment sour the soul, they devour it. The tenth commandment reads, “*You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet you neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is you neighbor’s.*” Paul characterizes covetousness as idolatry for three fundamental reasons: the first is that covetousness is not thankful to God. They devalue what God has given them. They are insistent that what they have [from God] is not sufficient for contentment and happiness. So inwardly they complain and mutter and mumble and are discontent in the face of God. It goes further than that: secondly, the person who is covetousness has focused on something they want and they actually want it and they exalt it over God, who has given Himself for them. Thirdly, by implication, they are certain that this thing can make them more content and happy than God Himself. That is why it is idolatry: God is pushed aside, and the heart longs for, yearns after, seeks and pursues and will not be content until it has got what it wants. Covetousness is a gnawing hunger that seeks to satisfy itself by feeding on the lives and possession it sees that others have. It is, in fact, a root of bitterness in the soul. God says this to us: come, eat and I will make you full. The person who is in the grip of covetousness says, no, I will go and find my own food elsewhere.

As noted in verse 5, Paul is blunt: people who are sexually immoral or impure, or who are covetous have no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Paul says this, but we debate this. We need to recognize that at this point Paul is not inviting us to explore the limits of grace, the degrees of acceptable sin, or the minimums for “still being saved.” The minute you start asking those kinds of questions – “How far can I go in sin before I’ve gone too far?” – the minute you start asking those questions, the evidence is that your love for God is withering away. Do you believe me? Try this with your wife, men, or wives, try this with your husbands: “Well, we’ve been married for about five and a half years; can’t I start flirting with some of the other women (men) in the office?” “We have a stable covenantal relationship with each other, my wife and I; so really we can begin to ‘branch out’. How far can I ‘branch out’?” We do that with God. “Will God still love me. . . if I do this? Will God still love me. . . if I do that? Will God still love me. . . ?” How far can I push the limits of grace? Will my wife still love me. . . if I go away overnight and don’t tell her where I have gone? Will my wife still love me. . . ?” How far can I go? This is the withering away of love.

It is not just that: it is the bankruptcy of faith. Faith closes with God in the assurance that God is sufficient to cleanse me of my sin, restore me in His favor and bless me with the fellowship of His Holy Spirit: hallelujah! So why do I go elsewhere? Do I cease to trust Him? Do I cease to have confidence that He in fact will meet my needs? Yes, I do. This is the bankruptcy of faith and goes with the withering away of love. Finally, when you begin to ask those kinds of questions you are seeing faith begin to slide into religion: calculated behavior designed to keep God happy while giving oneself room to live without regard to God. There is a reason why idolatry is called adultery; it is because they are the same. How many, or women in our enlightened and liberated age, make a point of giving gifts to their spouse, making sure they are happy, so they can continue to enjoy relationships on the side? Immorality, idolatry, adultery: cheating! A religion of rules designed to keep God happy and therefore off your back is a mocker of real or saving faith.

The gospel is preached so that people will be saved and live in the kingdom of Christ and God as friends of the Father and Son. If I want to be a friend of God, I do not ask the questions, “How little time can I get away spending with You? How little effort can I put into this relationship and still hang on?” Rather, “what is it that stands in the way of my becoming the best friend I can possibly be?” That is the question that the true friend asks. Paul warns that we should not be deceived in these matters, that is, in the soul states that he has named – sexual immorality, uncleanness or impurity and covetousness – these things he says bring the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience.

When you hear the word “son” in this case, of course, it is not referring to biology but to character and characteristics. Paul has referred to the sons of disobedience in Ephesians 2:2 as those, he says, whose lives “. . . follow the course of the world. . .” and again, “. . . follow the prince of the power of the air.” They are shaped like the culture around us. They are worldlings and they are lost. Sons of disobedience indeed do not grieve over sins. They relish them. In fact, they find them entertaining. Paul says this in Romans 1:32, “*Though they know God’s decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.*” So as I mentioned before, these things are not to be the substance of our entertainment.

Beginning at verse 7 Paul contrasts the sons of disobedience from the children of light (v.8). Here is your “light” and “dark”. First he says there needs to be a separation. We need to recognize a pulling apart of these two things. We are to separate; why are we to separate? The main reason he gives is because we used to be darkness ourselves, and there is an answering knowledge to the desires and interests and delights of darkness within our souls and we can so easily fall back into old patterns of thought, feeling and behavior. You want to avoid that at all costs because your body has become the temple of the Holy Spirit and you don’t want to fall back into those old patterns. Fallen, unredeemed people operate naturally out of their nature, but we are new creatures in Christ. But that new creature has not yet brought every thought captive to Christ.

Paul uses a word that is translated as “associate”. “Associate” in Ephesians 5:7 means “to be one who shares with or participates, a partner or a companion or a comrade.” Now if you were to go over and read I Corinthians 5:9-11 which is a parallel passage dealing with holiness, you would find that he uses the word “associate” there also, but it is not the same word: translations do not always help us out. This is what he says in I Cor. 5:9-11, “*I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people. Not at all meaning the sexual immoral of this world – sons of disobedience – or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. but now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.*” In this passage a different [Greek] word is used for “associate”. In this case it means “to have dealings with”. For, you see, holiness of the individual believer as well as holiness of the whole body of Christ is at issue here in First Corinthians. We recognize that a different standard of association exists between unrepentant sinners [not in the covenant] and believers, and unrepentant sinners who are also believers, who are in the covenant. We can certainly have dealings with worldly sinners, for that is how we witness for Christ in the world. But we are not to [or] become companions or comrades with them in their sin. We are to stand aside, withhold, resist and hopefully for their sakes restrain them in their sin. On the other hand, what Paul here indicates is that we are not even to have dealings with unrepentant [sinners who are] believers. Oh! Sexual immorality, greed, revilers, drunkards, swindlers: the unrepentant, we are not to have anything to do with them. Is it any wonder that we prefer not to know each other very well? Is it any wonder that our churches are a hair’s breath away from being religious institutions rather than communities of faith?

Now let me shift gears slightly. Notice what Paul says in v.9: “. . . *the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true.*” If we reflect upon that you will very quickly, I think, if you are familiar with the scripture find an association with Philippians 4:8-9. Paul there writes to that favored church that he loved so much, “*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.*” This is a very attractive set of verses for me; you could spend a lot of time reflecting upon what Paul has here said about the disciplines of the mind. Our minds are ceaselessly active. Most of us know this. Paul’s statement in Ephesians 4:23 is that we are to be renewed in the spirit of our minds. This takes on a progressively deeper significance both as we become more acquainted with the word of God and as we simply deal with the facts of life. Each one of us builds a private world of memories and expectations, things we consider to be obvious and true and things we doubt and discount. Studies of the human mind have determined that we all of us engage in what is a sort of stream of consciousness self-talk, constantly reinforcing our own opinions, our hopes, our

fears, and other things as well. If you go into secular psychology what they will tell you by and large is that you are a victim of your own mind. You can scarcely escape the trap of your own past; that you keep repeating and repeating, driving and driving deeper and deeper into your psyche this fallen perception of the world. But the gospel says there is a different future for us. The gospel says we can change the way we think. That is comprehensive. It means we can change what the desires are that grab us and hold us and thrust us forward. We are not victims of our flesh. The power of the Spirit through the revealed Word of God we are more than conquerors is what Paul says. In Romans 5:1-5, another passage dealing with holiness, Paul begins with speaking of the peace we have with God. Then this peace we have with God enables us to rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Then Paul in that little section ends by saying, “. . .and hope does not put us to shame [disappoint us] because love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” The disciplines of holiness are the disciplines of listening to and following the counsel of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. When we do this He gives us the strength to be holy.

In light of these lessons, we might consider the messages of the past few weeks, the emphasis I drew from the scriptures on the size of the Christian’s burden – I want to stress that it is scripture itself that describes this burden as great, light and easy of course compared with the death-weight of sin, but by no means trivial when considered in itself – I want to emphasize something I noted in I Corinthians 1:8-9 to which I referred last week, but only in passing. This is what Paul there says, “*For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.*” Beloved, what is it like to be friends with the God who raises the dead? Do you know that God, that God, not the god of our imagination; not the god of our choosing; but the God who raises the dead? Let me prevail on you just a moment. I want to close by reading a remarkable statement by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. I have mentioned him before. He talks about what it means to know the God Who raises the dead. He wrote this when he was about 31. This was before he became involved in the conspiracy to assassinate Hitler. But you can see in these words how God prepared this man who walked knowingly into the face of death.

“No one has yet believed in God and the kingdom of God, no one has yet heard about the realm of the resurrected, and not been homesick from that hour, waiting and looking forward joyfully to being released from bodily existence. [Can you taste heaven?]”

Whether we are young or old makes no difference. What are twenty or thirty or fifty years in the sight of God? And which of us knows how near he or she may already be to the goal? That life only really begins when it ends here on earth, that all that is here is only the prologue before the curtain goes up—that is for young and old alike to think about. Why are we so afraid when we think about death? . . .Death is only dreadful for those who live in dread and fear of it. Death is not wild and terrible, if only we can be still and hold fast to God’s Word. Death is not bitter, if we have not become bitter ourselves. Death is grace, the greatest gift of grace that God gives to people who believe in him. Death is mild, death is sweet and gentle; it beckons to us with heavenly power, if only we realize that it is the gateway to our homeland, the tabernacle of joy, the everlasting kingdom of peace.

How do we know that dying is so dreadful? Who knows whether, in our human fear and anguish we are only shivering and shuddering at the most glorious, heavenly, blessed event in the world?

Death is heal and night and cold, if it is not transformed by our faith. But that is just what is so marvelous, that we can transform death.”

Do you know the God who raises the dead? I invite you to be His friend and to live triumphantly amidst all the sin and trouble of a fallen world. Let us pray.

Our heavenly Father, we try so hard to fit our faith inside the narrow limits of what the world tells us is true. Forgive us for that. Grant that we by Your grace, Father, might live outside the limits which the world sets for us, that we might, therefore, have strength to stand fast no matter what sort of opposition comes at us, and to do so, Father, not with the arrogant lifted up fist of foolish pride of power hungry men, but with the humble and gentle spirit, full of peace and joy,

“Light and Dark”

Ephesians 5:3-14

August 1, 2010
Pastor John Bronson

because we know that you are the God Who raises the dead, even us, through our Lord Jesus Christ. In His name we pray.
Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. Do you find conversations about God and being a Christian are more often about our obedience or His blessings? Can you go too far in emphasizing either of these?
2. What reason is most often given or do you most often hear for becoming a Christian?
3. Which seems more prevalent in America today, sexual sins or sins of covetousness?
4. James tells us that to commit one sin is to commit them all, so all sins are the same. Even so, Paul makes a distinction regarding sexual sins. What is that distinction and why is it so critical according to Paul? (see 2Corinthians 6:18-19)
5. In what ways should we and in what ways should we not “associate” with unbelievers? When should we not associate with believers? What is your personal experience with this?
6. What do you find to be the greatest challenges to having a renewed mind?
7. What do you find to be the greatest challenges to maintaining the disciplines of listening to and following the counsel of the Spirit?
8. What experiences have you had in knowing the peace and the joy of the Lord?