

Ephesians 5:8-14

When Saul of Tarsus set out for Damascus with letters of authority to arrest Christian men and women and bring them back for punishment in Jerusalem, he was ignorant of the God he claimed to serve. He was a man who was consumed with a passion to keep the Law of God and thus destroy anything or anyone who might threaten his religion. His zeal for the Law, which among other things said do not kill, caused him to pursue Christians with murderous intent. His boast of keeping the Law caused him to break the Law.

On the way to Damascus the Lord Jesus appeared to him in a blinding light from heaven. Saul was hurled to the ground in darkness. He was blind for three days. God sent Ananias to cure him of his blindness, to baptise him and to explain that he was a chosen instrument of God to carry Christ's name to Jews, Kings and the nations. Saul's life for the Law was shattered. His passion was then resurrected in serving the God who showed him such extraordinary mercy that Saul the enemy of Christ became Saul the ambassador for Christ. His life was now a life for Christ and in Christ.

Saul had been dramatically rescued from the spiritual darkness that promised him certain death and brought into the glorious light of life under God's amazing grace. He was a new creation. He was a member of the new humanity with Christ as its head.

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It was probably because of the blinding light in Paul's own conversion that he would often write of the Christian's conversion in terms of darkness and light. For example he wrote to Corinth, "For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Cor. 4:6) He uses those same light and darkness images in our epistle reading today. We will reflect further on this imagery in Ephesians.

Firstly we are urged to understand what we were and are.

When Paul wrote to his Asian Christian friends, he says "You were darkness". He did not say, "You were merely in darkness" but "You were darkness"(5:8). During their years of paganism they were darkness itself. These were the days of the old nature or as the Greek says, "old man" or "old humanity" (4:22)

However now because they had believed in Jesus, the Light of the world, they were united with him and were light. These are the days of the "new nature" or "new man" or "new humanity". In fact such is this union that Jesus declares not only himself to be the Light of the world but also his disciples (Jn. 8:12, Matt. 5:8). When people in this world wander around whistling in the darkness, looking for some meaning and purpose in life, their search can come to an end by looking at the Christian. Here is the true "light of life" every lost person is looking for.

Secondly we are urged to be what you now are.

Paul's exhortation is "you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light."(5:8). You are Light in the Lord therefore be what you are. He then expands this command negatively and positively.

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Negatively Paul writes, "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness" and goes even further with "instead expose them"(5:11). Now just in case we think this is a bit vague, we have only to read a little earlier in his letter. We are to flee falsehood, sinful anger, stealing, evil talk, bitterness, anger, wrath, clamour, slander, malice, fornication, all impurity, covetousness, filthiness, silly talk and levity (4:25-5:4). We are to make every effort to distance ourselves from these things because they belong to our past. They belong to the old nature. They belong to the old humanity.

Positively Paul writes, "we are to walk as children of light" and "try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord" (5:8-10). Just as specifically Paul writes of "the fruit of light". It is found in all that is good and right and true. It is speaking the truth, not letting the sun go down on our anger, doing honest work so we can give to those in need, edifying speech, being kind and tender-hearted, being forgiving and loving and always thankful to God (4:25-5:4,9). We are to try to learn these things because they please the Lord; because in fact it is learning Christ. We are to embrace these things because they belong to our present and future. They belong to the new nature. They belong to the new humanity.

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Hmmm! Perhaps someone may object and say isn't Paul saying "keep the Law." Well, yes he is. BUT the motivation is entirely different. **Previously Paul was keeping the Law in order to be saved. Now he is keeping the Law because he is saved.** Under God's favour in Christ we have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. In Christ we are chosen before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him, adopted as his children, forgiven our trespasses, redeemed by Christ's blood, know that all things will be united under Christ in the fullness of time and have been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise (1:3-14). Under such grace, favour and mercy, no-one can or need to boast before God.(2:8-10). We are God's new creation.

In calling for our lifestyle to be consistent with whom we really are, the new humanity, Paul cites what appears to be part of a baptism service. We can easily imagine the congregation of God's people addressing the newly baptised as they come up out of the water with

“Awake , O sleeper, and arise from the dead
and Christ will give you light” (5:14).

As we rise from the baptismal waters, we rise as the people of God, as the New Humanity, therefore live we ought to live as such.