

Unfruitful Works Of Darkness

Ephesians 5:6-14

6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not become partners with them; 8 for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), 10 and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. 13 But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, 14 for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." (Ephesians 5:6-14 (ESV))

As we began our study of these words last week, we acknowledged that there truly is a strange, incomprehensible kind of darkness that fills and engulfs and covers over this entire world, and everything in it.

And unlike the ordinary nighttime darkness that we are accustomed to, this special kind of darkness has its own personality, an aggressive "nature" that seeks to reach into, and to invade and to dominate and to control everything that takes place within that darkness, every heart, every soul, the things people think, the things they say and the things they do. And that nature is so very, very evil and insidious beyond measure. And the ordinary people who live within that darkness, seem not to realize their true condition. And rather than seeking ways to overcome the darkness, they simply accept it as being "normal".

And they seek to explain its condition through logic and intellectual rationale, ignoring the unexplainable and reducing all of the rest of their circumstances down to only that which they can understand through their natural senses; that of hearing, seeing, touch, taste and smell. And because people choose that course of "rational thinking", sadly most all of them will live their entire lives and then die never knowing that their entire existence was lived within a mysterious sea of darkness.

Again, how can such a thing be taking place and men not be able to realize the presence of this "darkness"? These scriptures describe the condition as being a form of "blindness", a blindness that is brought into the minds of men by the insidious powers that live and move and have their being within those realms of that dark world. Our scripture reference again is from chapter 6 of Ephesians, where we read,

12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

(Ephesians 6:12 (NIV))

And we must understand clearly that these “spiritual forces” spoken about here, really do have “powers”, “powers” that go far beyond the “natural” limits that the ordinary mind is able to perceive, the power to influence and even control the ideas and philosophies and behaviors of otherwise ordinary people who buy into their manner of thinking.

May I pause for a moment here and also remind us that the “heavenly realms” spoken about here in verse 12 of Ephesians 6 are not “up there” somewhere as we are prone to think when we hear the word “heaven”. These “heavenly realms” are not the “heaven” that we read about and hope to go to when we die, that place where our mansions of glory are prepared and waiting for us when we breathe our last here in this life. No, these “heavenly realms” are right here in amongst us on the earth. And we are walking in and through those “realms” every moment of every day. They are the “realms” where angels and demons freely go about the things they do; and yes even where at least some of the saints who have gone on before us also abide, that place where the “great cloud of witnesses” surrounds us as we go about the ordinary matters of our daily life.

And those “heavenly places” are the “realms” in which we find that “narrow path” that leads to life, but also, where we find that “broad path” that leads to destruction, both paths intertwining with each other as we go through the normal activities of daily life. And again, unfortunately, these “heavenly realms” are the well-spring from which this “mysterious darkness” is able to freely flow and to influence not only the “sons of disobedience”, but also even the most devout of believers.

But thankfully, also within these “heavenly places” is the “miraculous light of Christ” that shines out and brings hope and vision to those who have chosen to follow after that “narrow path”. And yes, again, all of these things are mysterious and they remain unseen and even unnoticed by most all of the inhabitants of this world. But may I say again, please do understand . . . this is all very, very real and very, very true.

A question that we wonder is, “why does God choose to do these things in this way, where everything is so unseen and mysterious?” I am convinced that one of His greater reasons is simply “mercy” and “grace” towards us. Folks our meager minds and our man-made courage would not be able to withstand the stress and the terrors of being able to freely see such insidious evil flowing around us each day. We would surely be

paralyzed in fright at even a glimpse of the reality of all that is taking place around us in those “heavenly places”.

And while I have sometimes been chided that I should not look for a “demon behind every bush”, I am absolutely convinced that they are here and they are “up close” and “personal”. And they do all of those demonically evil things that these words of scripture speak about.

And that continual interaction and influence with us who live in the visible, “natural” world is the subject of the text that we are studying here today.

A few moments ago, we spoke about the reason why the ordinary eye cannot perceive the presence of the “darkness”. And we said that in addition to the mercy and grace of God, it is because the darkness is able to produce a kind of “blindness” within the hearts and minds of men, a kind of “scale” that covers over the eyes and prevents the light from entering in. Listen, these words from 2 Corinthians 4 . . .

3 . . . if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 4 whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.
(2 Corinthians 4:3-4)

And in Revelations 3, we read,

17 You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.
(Revelation 3:17 (NIV))

This thing that is so highly valued among men, our “free will”, really does have a “downside” to its privilege. Because of our “free will” we can intentionally walk through all the days of our lives poor, wretched, pitiful, naked and blind, selectively seeing only what we want to see. Why would that be so? Though we would be quick to deny it, the simple answer is that we actually “love” these piteous conditions that we live within.

John 3 again . . .

19 . . . Men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. 20
"For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. (John 3:19-20 (NASB))

And it is not a difficult task for the demons of the dark world to reach into and corrupt our hearts, minds and souls. We come into this life already prepared for their evil influence. The words of Ezekiel 36 tell us clearly that we begin our lives with hearts as hard as stones and with spirits that are broken.

And left unchanged, our hard hearts and our broken spirits can easily be swayed to join in and actively participate with the inhabitants of the dark world in all the many vile things that they think and say and do, described here in our text as, “unfruitful works of darkness”.

How do we know that we are prone to take part with them in the things they do? It is because God warns us against it right here . . .

6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not become partners with them. (Ephesians 5:6 (ESV))

And in verse 11,

11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. (Ephesians 5:1 (ESV))

What are those “unfruitful works”, those “deeds of evil” that even we who are saved can get caught up in? Listen, some of them are described for us in Galatians 5,

19 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21 (NIV))

Are not these behaviors simply awful? They are truly the “under-belly” of the existence of man! And may I say, and sadly so, that these words actually describe the “ordinary” and the “normal” conditions and activities of most of the daily life taking place throughout our world. And again, whether the view be taken from the “crime ridden streets” of our inner-cities, or from the brownstone apartments of doctors and lawyers, or even from the ideal suburban neighborhoods of the average hard-working American, the condition and the sins are still basically the same, and they are running rampant all day, every day.

Consider these words for a moment. These acts of the sinful nature really are so very common to us all, and even among “born-again” believers who are supposed to no longer live under the control of their sinful nature. Listen, verse 19 of Galatians 5 . . .

19 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. (Galatians 5:19-21 (NIV))

Here, and not so strangely so, at the very top of the list of the “unfruitful works of darkness” is sexual immorality. And that is for good reason, because literally within every venue of life today, sexual immorality in all of its vilest forms is completely out of control, from teenagers, to adults, to the party scene, to the college campuses, to office workers, and on and on. Sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery have become the “norm” of daily life.

And being fed from out of that “dark world”, feelings and passions seem to go beyond all boundaries of restraint that ordinary people are able to muster within their souls. And because of that, those things that used to be hidden in the darkness, behind closed doors, are now open and commonplace within most every heart and mind of practically everyone we encounter.

And sexual immorality is only the first of these “unfruitful works”. This list of “unfruitful works”, these sinful behaviors continue on and on, and they are absolutely common to most all of us, both believers and unbelievers alike . . . verse 20, “hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness”, and the like.

A question . . . are we, are you and I willing to admit that at least some of these sinful behaviors, these “unfruitful deeds of darkness” are taking place in us and in our daily lives?

May I say to us clearly and plainly that because God takes these opportunities to warn us about these behaviors here in these words, His doing that is proof-positive that these “unfruitful works of darkness” are absolutely taking place within the hearts and lives of most all of us ordinary, everyday Christians. And He wants us to stop doing these things. Listen again to the words of our text . . .

6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not become partners with them; 8 for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), 10 and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. 13 But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, 14 for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” (Ephesians 5:6-14 (ESV))

Here, the first warning to us is that there are circumstances and influential people who will absolutely do their best to convince us to turn our hearts to their manner of thinking and behaving. They will try to deceive us with “empty words”, words that have no goodness in them. And we are here warned to not become “partners” with them. We must be careful, we can “partner” in many ways. God speaks about them in 2 Corinthians 6, where He tells us,

14 Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with (unrighteousness)? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? 15 What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? (2 Corinthians 6:14-15 (ESV))

And this command is to be applied in every condition of daily life, whether it be in boyfriend/girlfriend relationships, marriages, friendships, and even in our work relationships, all very tough decisions. But God is adamant in these words. You and I are not allowed to “abide with”, or “partner with” unbelievers. We will surely be corrupted by them.

May we close for today and pick back up next week from these words of verse 8 . . .

8 for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), 10 and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. (Ephesians 5:6-14 (ESV))