**Children of Light**

Text: Ephesians 4:25-5:21

Rev. David Waldron

**Scriptures:** Matthew 5:13-16; Genesis 1:1-5; Ephesians 4:25-5:21

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 171, 119:105-112, 27, 439, 525

**Series:** Ephesians (#20)

**Theme:** The Apostle Paul writes to the Ephesian believers about the behaviour of new self in which the image of God is being restored so that they can walk as children of light.

**Proposition:** Walk as a child of the Light – be a luminary!

**Introduction**

Would you describe yourself as a ‘luminary’? A luminary is a ‘person of prominence or brilliant achievement’. The word ‘luminary’ is also used to describe a celestial body which gives off light; like a star, or a planet or the moon which reflect the light of the sun.

When the Apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 5:8 “*for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light*”, he is exhorting, encouraging, calling, the Ephesian believers to live as the children of God that they have become in Christ.

‘Darkness’ in Scripture symbolises chaos (Gen 1:2-3). It is the place where evil hides (Job 34:22). The ‘*land of darkness*’ is a description of death (Job 10:21-22; 17:13; Ps 88:6). Darkness is often associated in the Bible with supernatural events of God’s judgement such as the plagues in Egypt (Ex 10:21); the coming of the Lord (Isa 13:9-10; Joel 2:31; Matt 24:29) and the crucifixion of Christ (Matt 27:45). Hell is the ‘outer darkness’ (Matt 8:12; 22:13; 25:30). Darkness also symbolises ignorance of God and His ways (Isa 8:22; 9:2; John 12:46; Acts 26:18). Those who live this in this life, apart from God, ‘walk in darkness’ (John 8:12; 1 John 1:6), doing ‘the works of darkness’ (Rom 13:12; Eph 5:11). Darkness is the absence of light. John writes that “*God is light, and in him is no darkness at all*” (1 John 1:5).

Jesus identified Himself on this earth as being ‘*The light of the world*’ (John 9:5). Gospel writer John records that “*this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God*." (John 3:19-21). Light reveals what would otherwise be hidden in darkness. Light enables us to perceive what is. Light provides understanding.

As we’ve seen over the past few weeks, the light of God’s Word from the letter to the Ephesians has been shining on us, illuminating our hearts. In the large section from chapter 4:17-5:18, the Apostle Paul uses the word picture of changing clothes to describe the pattern of life of the old unconverted self in contrast to the new self as a creation in Christ. In verse 24 of chapter 4 he writes: “*put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness*”. The clothing of the ‘new self’ is the restored image of God. In our text, Paul describes a number of items of ‘character clothing’ which make up the new self, in contrast to a number which are only fitting for the old self. I have chosen to organise these items of ‘character clothing’ into three groups and to focus on each one of these in turn in three messages from the same text: Ephesians 4:25-5:18. The three categories refer to the type of ‘clothing’, they are: Attitude, speech and behaviour. We have already looked at ‘a new attitude’ and ‘a new voice’.

Today our focus is on how we behave as ‘children of light’. There are two points:

1. The old conduct
2. The new conduct
3. **The old conduct**

If you are out in the mountains tramping then it’s important to be well equipped: good boots, warm and windproof clothing, food and drink. If you are tramping at night when there is no moon, then what would you say is the most important piece of equipment to have? It is a torch, or some other source of light. Walking in darkness is not only dangerous, it is impossible to go in the right direction if you can’t see the way to go.

There are many ways of thinking, speaking and behaving which can be accurately described as ‘walking in darkness’. We looked into the ‘wardrobe’ of the old self a few weeks ago and saw some ‘darkness mindset items’ in our text: covetousness (5:3), anger (4:26,31), wrath (4:31), malice (4:31), bitterness (4:31), foolishness (5:17). Then we looked at the ‘old tongue’. “*It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison*” (James 3:8) and we saw these ‘items’: falsehood (4:25), corrupting talk (4:29), clamour (4:31), slander (4:31), filthiness (5:4), foolish talk (5:4), and crude joking (5:4)

Now, as we focus on the conduct of the ‘old self’, we see the following behaviours: stealing (4:28), sexual immorality and all impurity (5:3), drunkenness which is debauchery (5:18). We’re going to look now in detail at these items of character clothing:

**Stealing** is taking something or somebody that does not belong to you. To steal is to break the eighth commandment (Ex 20:15). It is likely that some in the Christian community to which Paul wrote in the letter of Ephesians had been thieves before they came to saving faith in Christ. In the ancient world, tangible physical objects were stolen, like cattle, precious metals, clothes. Today, theft is more complex. Patents for new technologies can be stolen, as can credit card details. Large companies are able to ‘steal’ personal data from unsuspecting consumers. We can divide stealing into two categories, active and passive.

When someone actively steals, they wilfully, maliciously, take what belongs to someone else. Examples of active stealing are listed in the Heidelberg Catechism answer 110 as follows: cheating and swindling our neighbour; schemes made to appear legitimate such as inaccurate measurements of weights, size, or volume, fraudulent merchandising, counterfeit money, excessive interest. Additional examples include embezzlement, extortion, kidnapping and enslavement.

Examples of passive stealing include:

* negligence that results in a loss to someone else (ref. Ex 22:1-15). Littering and causing pollution of the environment fit into this category.
* Finding something that belongs to someone else and not returning it (ref. Lev 6:3; Deut 22:1-4) embodied in the phrase “finders keepers, losers weepers”.
* In the work place: arriving to work late, leaving early, taking unjustified ‘sick’ days, extensive socialising with co-workers, inattention to the job at hand, browsing the internet during work hours, eating lunch at the desk and then going out for the ‘lunch hour,’ excessive personal phone calls, on-the-job daydreaming.

Stealing does harm to one’s neighbour by taking what rightfully belongs to him or her. Stealing causes loss and harm to the victim. Stealing is fuelled by greed or covetousness; the strong desire to acquire ever more material possessions, especially those which are forbidden. Ultimately, people steal because they do not trust in God to provide for what they need.

Stealing is completely contrary to the character of God who is gracious and who gives freely. He does not greedily take. Fundamentally, we do not ‘own’ anything. We are stewards called to wisely look after what we have been blessed with by God, for a limited time only.

**Sexual immorality and all impurity**. The Greek word translated ‘sexual immorality’ in our text is the word ‘pornea’ from which we get the English word ‘pornography’. Pornea refers to sexual activity outside of marriage and includes not only pre-marital and extramarital sex, prostitution and incest but also homosexuality and other distortions of God’s created order (Romans 1:24-27). Sexual immorality was a major problem in the Greco-Roman world in which the Ephesians lived, just as it is today. Technology has changed, but the human heart remains the same. Sexual purity is seen by many (or even most) people as outdated and irrelevant, perhaps even unattainable. Sexual activity outside marriage is deemed to be permissible, even preferable, as long as it is ‘safe’ and consensual. The truth is that mutually consenting sexual activity within the marriage, between one man and one woman, is clean and pure. However, sexual activity is impure outside the marriage union between a husband and his wife.

The Greek word translated ‘impurity” describes a filthiness of heart and mind which defiles a person. It can also be translated ‘uncleanness”. Impurity includes sexual immorality, but it has a broader scope which describes any immoral act. Such impurity is a moral uncleanness which disables a person from knowing God. Jesus described the Jewish religious leaders in this way: “*You are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness*” (Matt 23:27). The scribes and Pharisees were walking in darkness, they were full of all impurity, as such they were blind guides (Matt 15:14). They had no light. They were not the leaders to follow.

**Drunkenness which is debauchery.** ‘Getting drunk with wine’ means consuming alcohol to the point of intoxication, resulting in a loss of self-control. Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) was a Welsh protestant minister who had been trained as a medical doctor. He wrote: “*Drink is not a stimulus; it is a depressant. It depresses first and foremost the highest centres of all in the brain… They control everything that gives a man self-control, wisdom, understanding, discrimination, judgment, balance, the power to assess everything; in other words, everything that makes a man behave at his very best and highest. The better a man’s control, the better man he is*”. Wine and other alcoholic beverages are readily available and relatively inexpensive in New Zealand. Excessive consumption results in damaging effects on human health, relationships, finances and many other aspects of a person’s life. This is the reality behind the word ‘debauchery’, sometimes translated ‘dissipation’ (NASB, NKJ). To dissipate something is to scatter it. It describes a careless, wasteful pattern of living which impairs or ruins the dissipator. The prodigal son in the parable which Jesus told, ‘*squandered his property in reckless living*’ (Luke 15.13).

The corrupt conduct of the ‘old self’, with theft, greed, sexual immorality, impurity, drunkenness and dissipation is not fitting for the ‘new self’ which in which the restored image of God is to be evident. Brothers and sisters, it’s very easy for us all to skip past these things and think that we never ‘put on’ this conduct clothing of the ‘old self’. Let’s be wiser than that, and allow the light of God’s Word to penetrate any darkness which remains in our hearts today. Let’s admit to ‘wardrobe’ malfunctions when we slip back into the clothing of the old self. Let’s admit to persistent patterns of behaviour which are not fitting for God’s children who walk in the light of His great love.

We can do this with courage and conviction knowing that in Christ we have a high priest who is able to sympathise with our weaknesses. He was in every respect tempted as we are, yet without sin (Heb 4:15). “*Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need*” (Heb 4:16). Walking in darkness is no way to live for the ‘*new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness*’ (Eph 4:24). There is a better way, a brighter way. There is a different type of behaviour, an alternative ‘set of clothing’ which brings us to our second point:

1. **The new conduct**

Brothers and sisters, we are all called to be ‘luminaries’. Not as people of prominence because of our own achievements, but because we belong to Christ, the most prominent Person and the Highest Achiever. Just as the moon shines on this earth, reflecting the bright light of the sun, so we are like mirrors, reflecting the light of Christ in a darkened world, transmitting through our attitudes, words and deeds the true light of the Son of God. The ‘new clothing’ of the ‘new self’ is highly reflective. Putting on the new self is like wearing a garment covered in a myriad of little mirrors. Bearing the image of God in true righteousness and holiness, enables us to be bright lights in a dark world as we reflect the glory of God.

We’ve already looked at some of the ‘wardrobe’ of the new self in previous weeks from our text. The bright mindset, the Christlike attitudes of: kindness (4:32), tender-heartedness (4:32), forgiveness (4:32), understanding (5:17). The ‘new tongue’ which speaks only the truth, talks in such a way that the words spoken build up others, and uses language which expresses thanksgiving. Now here are the behaviours from our text which are part of the conduct of those who walk as children of the light:

1. Working in order to be generous (4:28).
2. Not associating with the ‘sons of disobedience’ (5:6).
3. Exposing the ‘unfruitful works of darkness’ (5:11).
4. Making the best use of the time (5:16).
5. Being filled with the Spirit (5:18).

**Working hard in order to be generous**.

Paul writes about doing honest work in order to have something to share with anyone in need in 4:28. Working hard to the best of our ability is part of bearing the image of God who is Himself a Doer of good works. The Scripture here teaches that hard work is not to be pursued in order to amass personal wealth, but in order to enable greater generosity towards others who are in need. The willing generosity of the giver reflects the greater grace of God. Paul writes to the Corinthian church about the unselfish open-handedness of the Lord this way: “*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich*” (2 Cor 8:9).

**Do not associate with the ‘sons of disobedience’**.

The Greek word translated here ‘associate’ means ‘to have a close association with’. It was used in the ancient world to refer to people who jointly owned a house. Association here refers to an intimate relationship; a friendship or partnership in which there is close connection. This is not a call to completely distance ourselves from non-Christians. To do this would mean that they would never clearly see the light of Christ reflected in our lives (ref. Matt 5:13-16). However, this is a call to change our friendships and close relationships when we come to Christ so that we do not associate with those who walk in darkness.

It is true for all of us that our lives are influenced by those we associate with. Paul reminds the Corinthians about this by quoting from a Greek Poet (likely Menander’s Thais) when he writes that “*bad company corrupts good morals*” (1 Cor 15:33). To walk as children of light we need to choose our close friends, who we date or plan to marry, and with whom we share business interests carefully. Here is the same truth expressed in 2 Corinthians 6:14 “*Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers…. what fellowship has light with darkness?*” (also Psalm 1:1).

**Exposing the ‘unfruitful works of darkness’**.

To expose is to ‘bring to the light’ so that what has been previously hidden is revealed. Here it is the action of showing someone that they have done wrong and calling them to repentance. This ‘calling out of deeds of darkness’ is not so much by verbal admonition and rebuke (although this certainly has its place and its Scriptural warrant e.g. 1 Thess 5:14), but by the light which shines out from the ‘character clothing’ that we wear. Jesus said, “*everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed*” (John 3:20). When we ‘put on’ the conduct of the ‘new self’ we are ‘imitators of God’ (5:1) and this is one of the means by which the Lord convicts other people of sin through the working of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8). Bible commentator Wayne Barber has written: *"Since you now have a garment that is light, you don’t reprove the world by what you tell them. You reprove the world by how you live. It is my garment that exposes what is going on around me. If I am not wearing my garment, then what I say means nothing anyway”*.

**Making the best use of the time** because the days are evil**.**

The wise person understands that time is the most precious ‘commodity’ we have in this life. You cannot buy more of it, but you can make the most of the time you have – however long or short your lifespan. The Scriptures remind us of this truth in many places e.g. “*Our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding*” (1 Chron 29:15); "*My days are swifter than a runner; they flee away…like an eagle swooping on the prey*” (Job 9:25-26); “*So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom*” (Psalm 90:12). The call here is to wisely ‘buy up the opportunities’ to do the Lord’s will and not to waste our time with unfruitful activities. This is not a call to relentless activity without rest or recreation, but to wisely spend our finite resource of precious time in walking as children of light. So much more could be said about ‘time management’ – perhaps that is a subject for another sermon, but for now, we must move on.

**Being filled with the Spirit** is the last of the ‘conduct clothing’ of the ‘new self’ which we consider this morning. The Holy Spirit is given to believers to fill them with his presence and power. The Holy Spirit Himself is the crowning ‘clothing’ of the ‘new self’. We cannot put on the new self, we cannot obey any of the commands in Scripture, apart from God’s Spirit dwelling within us.

What though does Scripture mean for us to be ‘filled with the Spirit’? The contrast that Paul makes with being ‘drunk with win’ helps us to see that ‘being filled with the Spirit’ means to have all our behaviour controlled, not by intoxicating alcohol, but by God’s Spirit. The command to ‘be filled’ is in the present tense, so this is to be a continuous, life-long pattern of constantly being controlled by the Spirit in everything we think, speak or do. The call to ‘be filled’ is in the passive tense. We are called to be in a state of readiness to be filled with the Spirit by God the ‘Filler’. The command here is in the plural. We are called collectively (as well as individually) to be filled with the Holy Spirit. We’ll look at living under the influence of the Holy Spirit in more detail in the next sermon in this series.

We’ve spent a considerable amount of time looking at the wardrobe change from the ‘old self’ which walks in the darkness of separation from God, who is the source of all light. This is the fourth sermon which has focussed on the change from wretched rags to royal robes. I’ve spoken almost 14,000 words so far. Why? So that each one of us would change through the work of the Holy Spirit, as He fills us with the convicting truth of God’s Word.

So, are you willing to change? So that you can ‘*put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness*’ (Eph 2:24). Are you willing to change so that you can know the grace of God who, in Christ, continues to forgive us for our resistance to the Holy Spirit; our resistance to change. Are you willing to change so that you can more greatly desire to walk as a child of light, discovering and discerning what is pleasing to the Lord (5:10)? Are we willing to change so that we would be imitators of God, as beloved children (5:1)? Imitators of Christ who is our Saviour, Lord and perfect example, who said "*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life*." (John 8:12)

Brothers and sisters, be a luminary and reflect the glorious attitude, speech and behaviour of Christ!

AMEN.