

Light vs. Darkness
Eph 5:1-20

Brothers and sisters, what I'm about to tell you this morning has long been suspected, and the information I'm about to share will confirm it is true – that there are only two kinds of people in this world. Please allow me to demonstrate...

Star Wars or Star Trek? Kirk or Picard?
Pepsi or Coke? PC or Mac?
Cats or Dogs? Iphone or Samsung?

And for those of us old enough to remember... Beta or VHS?

But seriously, all joking aside the bible does confirm that all of humanity is divided into two categories.

Right from the very beginning when the Devil tempted Adam and Eve and they sinned, God divided humanity into two groups when He judged the serpent saying *“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers...”* (Gen 3:15)

So brothers and sisters, humans being are either descendants of the serpent, or they are descendants of the woman Eve, the mother of All the living.

And the implication that there are only two kinds of people in this world means that all of our human history and the development of civilization, as seen from a biblical viewpoint, is really the story of the conflict – the enmity – between the offspring of the serpent and the offspring of the woman and how that has played out across the ages.

It's sort of like the cosmic battle between good and evil that you see in Star Wars (*which is completely absent in Star Trek*)

However these two groups are not necessarily good people or evil people - that's a bit too simplistic, rather they are people who seek to be faithful to God according to the grace He has given them in spite of their sinfulness, or they are people who rebel against God, disobey, ignore Him and spurn His grace – even when they might do very good things.

Now God's grace has taken on various Covenantal forms throughout human history; Noah's Ark, the promise to Abraham, the Law of Moses - all of which come to their most familiar form for us in the nation of Israel and their distinctiveness from the rest of the nations around them.

And the understanding of how there are only two types of people in this world also developed into its most recognizable expression in this distinction between the Jews and Gentiles.

Now the distinction between Jews and Gentiles is a significant topic in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, because Paul wants to instruct us on how being IN Christ overcomes this old covenant distinction, and how the Church is formed from Jews and Gentiles unified IN Christ.

So much of what Paul teaches us in Ephesians, and how he wants us to see and understand this new creation of the Church is focused on the ways It (we) overcomes the Mosaic Covenantal distinctions between Jew and Gentile and how the Church unifies them instead.

Starting with the phrase "IN Christ" that Paul uses repeatedly; this is Paul's shorthand phrase to make reference for how both Jews and Gentile can be faithful covenant partners with Yahweh vicariously through Jesus as their covenant substitute.

The Jews knew what was required to be faithful but they fell short, while the Gentiles were unfaithful due to their ignorance – but IN Christ both can be seen by God as fully faithful and thus receive ALL the covenant blessings – this is an important benefit of BEING the Church.

And Paul also talks about how Christ has given the gifts of the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists and teaching pastors to the church so that they may unify and build up the body of Christ. (4:11-13) The church is equipped for unity here.

And then there are the numerous exhortations in the prior chapters where Paul encourages us to be patient and kind and humble and loving with each other, forgiving each other as God in Christ forgave us.

We are to treat one another in ways that contribute to unity, which will overcome the prior disdain the Jews had for the Gentiles and their ignorant sinful lives, and the offense which the Gentiles took at the Jew's superiority. So we see the church is instructed for unity.

And brothers and sisters, this theme of coming together in unity as the Church, which is so central to the book of Ephesians, really... really resonates with the current spirit of our day and age. Everywhere you turn these days someone is talking about being inclusive, accepting, and breaking down barriers, about overcoming divisions.

Now there is much that is good in all this but... there can be so much focus on overcoming division and unity that we forget there are still only two kinds of people in this world, and Paul does not want his Gentile converts and Jewish believers, and us, to mistakenly think that the obedience to God's Law which had previously distinguished the Jews has somehow been done away with now that Jews and Gentiles are unified IN Christ.

Do you see the danger that is present in this?

In the last chapter Paul was concerned that Gentiles, and ourselves, did not import their prior and futile way of thinking into the Church but that they learned how to think differently about Being the Church and their motivations for why they acted and met together in certain ways.

In this chapter Paul is concerned that the Gentiles, and ourselves, understand and see there are still - only two kinds of people in this world, only it's not along the lines of Jew and Gentile, it's about who is IN Christ... and who is NOT in Christ.

So Paul wants to help us understand this new distinction, what it involves and why it is important and how we are to live because of it, so let's look how he does that.

Starting with vs. 1- 3 where Paul begins by reminding us how God dealt with us in sending Christ who gave himself up and sacrificed himself for us, and Paul makes sure to note the aspects of how Christ's death connect to the old Mosaic

sacrificial requirements, and he urges us to follow God's example here.

Why? Because Paul is about to re-introduce something that divides us and he doesn't want to see a resurgence of the same kind of antagonistic, legalistic, prideful and judgmental attitudes which had come to characterize the Jew-Gentile relationship.

So he reminds us of how God came to us in Christ in spite of our sins – as he says in Romans 5:8 *“while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* so this sets the right context for talking about two kinds of people in the world and helps us to avoid becoming exclusive and judgmental.

However - there are still behaviors which we must avoid because they are sinful and they reflect the rebellious deception of the Serpent that we can decide what is right and wrong for ourselves.

God put enmity between us and the serpent and those who live according to his deception so we must not embrace or accept anything from him or from those he deceives.

Additionally we want to ensure that our lives and actions do not contradict our status of being IN Christ. Christ was perfectly obedient to God on our behalf, so our lives ought to begin to reflect that obedience more and more. *(Christ is also the WORD which orders and norms the creation so our lives IN Christ must also reflect this wisdom as well.)*

Now the big question for the Jews and Gentiles - and still for us today - was which parts of the Law of Moses still reflect God's intention for our lives IN Christ?

Now I've given entire sermons on that topic about how to understand the Law through God's creational Norms and the various Forms it takes in the Law and through Christ, so if you want to do more in-depth reading on that you can look those up those sermons on our website.

But the other way in which we can learn what still applies is just simply look at what parts of the Law that Paul teaches about in his letters!

After all Paul was THE apostle to the gentiles and was well suited to this role being the only Apostle who was also a trained religious expert and thus was specifically qualified to teach the gentiles, and us, what parts of the Law of Moses are still authoritative for our lives.

So if Paul brings it up – it's important for us, if Paul doesn't mention it – then we can let it go.

And in vs. 3-4 Paul teaches the Gentiles and us, that God's covenant laws and expectations for human sexuality are still in effect, and we learn that there must no hint of sexual immorality for those Jews and Gentiles who are IN Christ.

Now Paul uses three words here to encompass what we behaviors we must avoid; sexual immorality, impurity and greed – and they are connected together and build on each

other to encompass all immoral sexual actions, perverted thoughts and insatiable desires.

Now I could go into more detail on how ancient Greeks and Romans were sexually immoral but their time is past – it's about us now...

And you and I know all too well what sort of sexual immoral actions, impure thinking and insatiable desires are prevalent in our society and Paul's warning to us is that there must no hint of these things among us as a Church.

Which means they do not show up in our conduct with each other, nor are they tacitly or explicitly approved of in our teaching and doctrine, and if you need a more detailed list on what is considered sexually immoral you can refer to Leviticus 18.

Now we know that we can restrain ourselves from such immoral conduct with each other – all while having our thoughts impure and our desires go unchecked.

But that's why Paul continues on to say that there must be no obscene and foolish talk and course joking among us – because as Jesus said *“the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart...”* *“(Matt 15:18)*

If we still have impure thoughts and unchecked desires they will be evident in our speech, and again – our conduct and our teaching and doctrine must not tacitly or explicitly approve of this.

So the bar has been set high brothers and sisters – but this is not a perfectionist standard or a barrier to exclude people. Rather it serves to reinforce what Paul started the chapter with – that Christ loved us and gave himself up for us – to be a sacrifice for our sins and where we fall short, especially here.

When we struggle with sexual immorality in our actions, thoughts and desires we go back to Christ for our forgiveness and sanctification – there should be no hint among us that we consider sexual immorality good, normal or excusable, but rather an abundance of calling it for what it is, confessing it to

Christ, and receiving forgiveness for it and turning away from it – repeatedly if needed!

It's interesting and telling brothers and sisters that Paul chooses to highlight our sexual conduct, thinking and desires in the passage as the characteristic which distinguishes those who are IN Christ and who are NOT in Christ.

And in vs. 5-7 he drives this point home saying that the *“immoral, impure and greedy person does not have an inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ”* and that anyone who says differently about this matter is someone that we ought not to *“partner with.”*

So with the clear instruction that we are not to be involved with their actions and thinking and desires – how do we relate to those who are Not IN Christ - because from the start of this passage Paul makes it clear that he doesn't want to start another antagonistic Jew-Gentile kind of division but that instead we are to follow God's example of how he related to us as sinners.

So in vs.8-14 Paul uses the metaphor of light and darkness to characterize the two kinds of people in this world and how those who are IN Christ must relate to those who are not.

And the most amazing part of this, and the good news in this passage, is that someone who was once darkness can become light! *(no doubt he remembers his own encounter with the light on the road to Damascus as he writes this.)*

When we become children of the light and we bear the fruit of the light – goodness in our actions, righteousness in our desires, and truth in our thinking, *(which puts sexuality in its proper place between a husband and wife)* then our lives shine before others and expose their deeds of darkness for what they truly are.

And when we expose the darkness, and shine the light by living in ways that please the Lord, it can have the effect of changing that darkness into light. That's why Paul says *"everything that is illuminated becomes a light. This is why it is*

said: "Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

So those who are IN Christ are to have an illuminating relationship with those who are NOT in Christ – and truthfully this was always the way God intended the relationship between the Jews and Gentiles to work out. In Isaiah 49:6 God says *"I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."*

And Jesus picks up on this as well in Matthew 5:16 when he says to the Jews *"let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."*

So Paul gives us this metaphor of Light and Darkness to illustrate how we relate to those who are Not IN Christ so as not to participate or approve of their sexual immorality – but still engage them in a manner that imitates how God related to us in sending Jesus Christ for our sins.

Now remember – all of this is instruction for us together as the Church – this is part of how we are to BE together as the Church – and while it is good advice to follow as we individually relate to those NOT IN Christ – it is more powerful and we have more impact as the light when we do this TOGETHER as the Church.

So Paul encourages us as to BE a group, to BE the Church, and to be careful how we live together and to be wise in how we live together ; and in doing so we will have plenty of opportunities to shine because being IN Christ makes us different than those who are NOT yet in Christ.

We must make the most of those opportunities so that more people might see the light, be exposed by the light, and become a light themselves... but not remain by themselves.

You see brothers and sisters, one of the ways the Church can shine brightest today is by actually being together – so much of the sexual immorality that tempts us, which has been called good and normal and healthy by those Not IN Christ, occurs

when we are isolated and Sin can twist our need for intimacy and community and love and acceptance.

So when we are physically gathered together as Church, treating each other as Paul has taught us thus far in this letter, we offer the Godly alternative to sexual immorality that many people are searching for, that is the light that shines and exposes the darkness around us – and also can turn that darkness to light.

It would be foolish for us to neglect being together and not take advantage of this opportunity.

And that's why Paul concludes his teaching about how the children of the light are to relate to those who are darkness by exhorting us to gather together – in worship, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit and giving praise that thanksgiving to God.

For Paul the worship gathering is the redeemed and transformed demonstration of the intimacy and connection

and belonging brought about by the Holy Spirit which those who are Not IN Christ are seeking but not finding in their drunken debauchery with others.

Now brothers and sisters, it might be easy to think this message is all about the “bad people” out there and how we should avoid sexual immorality and not be like them – but that not what Paul wants us to take away from his reminder that there are still two kinds of people in this world.

Instead Paul wants us to make a decision about what kind of person you are going to be when it comes to BEing Church - for the sake of those who are not yet IN Christ.

Will you be the kind of person who continues to keep themselves at arm’s length, observing but not engaging, attending occasionally but not committing to BE Church?

Or will you cooperate with the Holy Spirit and allow Him to connect you together with other believers through engaging in worship and Being IN Christ?

Will you allow yourself to experience the love, community, intimacy, accountability and commitment and acceptance so that Church can BE a place where those in darkness can be found by the light?

So you see brothers and sisters – there really are only two kinds of people in this world, and there are only two kinds of people in the Church – the question is... which one are you?
Amen.