

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

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Speaker: Dr. Gordon Hughes

Ephesians - it's all about Christ: Shining as from Him - Ephesians 5:3-6:9

Today we come to the fourth talk in our second part of our series of talks, 'It's all about Christ', dealing with the practical chapters, Ephesians 4-6. Our subject is 'Shining as from Him'.

In 1555, in the reign of the so-called bloody Queen Mary, Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley were tied back to back to the stake to be burnt to death on a false charge of heresy. Their only crime was to insist that salvation was not to be found through the church but only by the grace of God through the redemptive work of Christ on the cross of Calvary. As the flames engulfed those two godly men, Hugh was heard to say to Nicholas, "Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England as, I trust, shall never be put out." Today, as Christians, we surely rejoice in the fact that the candle, lit by Latimer and Ridley, still burns, not only in England but throughout the world! This programme, 'Truth for Today', is only one small witness, amongst many, to that fact.

Mercifully, none of us is likely to share the same fate as Latimer and Ridley, but every Christian is called on to be a light for Christ in this dark world. As the children's hymn so pointedly reminds us:

*Jesus bids us shine
With a pure, clear light;
Like a little candle
Burning in the night.
In this world of darkness,
So we must shine -
You in your small corner,
And I in mine.*

(Susan Warner 1819-1885)

Our passage for consideration today is Ephesians 5:3-6:9. To begin with, we'll read Ephesians 5:3-10: "But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetousness man, who is an idolater, has any 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 be partakers with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), proving what is acceptable to the Lord."

Those few words, "Walk as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8), are key words in this section of the epistle. As we shall see, they cover every aspect of personal morality as well as our relationships with one another. Before we look at this in some detail, it is worth reminding ourselves that the first spoken words of God recorded in the Bible are "Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3). What God saw was necessary in the physical realm in creation, He would bring about in the spiritual realm through His people. That comparison between the physical realm and the spiritual realm is pointedly made by Paul: "For it is the God who commanded light to 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. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us" (2 Corinthians 4:6-7). So Paul encourages the Philippian believers to be "children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world" (Philippians 2:15).

The Lord Jesus was supremely the Light of the world (see John 8:12). So in those majestic opening words of John's Gospel, we read: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (John 1:1-5). Now we are called to be lights for Him!

A little girl was once asked to describe a saint. Having been brought up in a church with stained glass windows, she replied, "They are the people the light shines through"! In the Biblical use of the word, every true believer in Christ is a saint. The word essentially means 'a set apart one', and every Christian has been set apart by the Lord Jesus Christ to be for Him in this world. So although the girl's reasoning may not have been correct, her conclusion was absolutely correct!

We have spoken at some length in general terms about being lights for Christ, but I feel it is important that we all be clear about this. So we come back to Ephesians 5:3-6:9. As indicated earlier, we shall consider these under two main headings:

1. Shining in holy living (Ephesians 5:3-13)
2. Shining in personal relationships. (Ephesians 5:14-6:9)

Shining in holy living (Ephesians 5:3-13)

Paul leaves the Ephesians, and us, in no doubt that sexual purity is a necessary part of Christian living. The clear, consistent teaching of the Bible is that the sexual relationship is a gift from God to be enjoyed between one man and one woman within the marriage relationship. That message was especially important in Ephesus where stood the temple of Diana, or Artemis, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. You may recall that when Paul first visited Ephesus (see Acts 19:1-41), the Ephesians, as they turned to Christ for salvation, gave up the worship of their silver shrines to Diana. This caused consternation among the silversmiths of the city and they caused a protest. For two hours, the whole city cried, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians" (Acts 19:28). Archaeologists have uncovered statues of Diana, the many-breasted goddess. The statues were probably based on a meteorite that had fallen from the sky. Alongside the worship of Diana would be temple prostitutes. This was the background against which these Ephesian believers were brought up.

They were not alone in having to live in an immoral society. Paul writes to the Corinthian believers about their past life: "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Note those all-important words: "And such were some of you". These Corinthians, whatever their sin, had turned from that sin in repentance to Christ and found in Him the forgiveness of their sins and peace with God. That way back to God through repentance and faith is still open to each one of us today, no matter what the sins we have committed, just as these Ephesian believers had turned to Christ.

Some of us may feel that we have never been guilty of such sexual immorality. Before we throw up our hands in self-righteous horror, it is sobering to reflect on the words of Jesus: "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28). Who dare stand before such a holy God in the light of such words?

But it is also worth noting that after the words, "fornication and all uncleanness", Ephesians 5:3, Paul adds "or covetousness". Here is a sin which besets many, if not all, of us. It is not for nothing that the God who made us and who fully knows our human hearts set as the last of His Ten Commandments the words "You shall not covet..." (Exodus 20:17). Much of modern advertising is based on the fact that we are so prone to want what other people have and what we do not have. A lifestyle that turns from this greed of covetousness to "be content with such things as you have", as Hebrews 13:5 reminds us, will surely shine as a bright light in this self-seeking world!

Shining in personal relationships (Ephesians 5:14-6:9)

The other important section in our passage today has to do with shining in personal relationships. The number of relationships dealt with in this section is remarkable: wives, husbands, children, fathers (and by association, mothers), servants (or employees) and masters (or employers). You may feel that there is nothing remarkable about some of these relationships. They are sufficiently important to God to be part of this important letter. God's desire is that the light of Christ be seen in every aspect of life. A tall order! Yet the grace of Christ is sufficient to meet every need as Ephesians 5:14 reminds us, "Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light". It is important that our relationships are not dictated by political correctness, which is constantly changing, but rather on the unchanging standards of God's word. We will be able only to deal briefly with each of these in turn.

Wives

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Saviour of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything" (Ephesians 5:22-24).

These words may not go down very well in today's society with its emphasis on equality. "Wives, submit..." They cannot be dismissed as merely the words of Paul, a woman-hater! As part of Scripture, they come under the dictate, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable..." (2 Timothy 3:16).

God has established a divine order which we must recognise. So we read in 1 Corinthians 11:3, "...the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God." Let us be quite clear; this submission does not imply inferiority. That clearly cannot apply to the statement, "the head of Christ is God". That statement reflects the different roles which each has chosen voluntarily to take. So with the wife and her husband as each fulfil their God-given role.

Husbands

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:25-27).

Wow! What a tall order! To love as Christ loved the church - so much so that He died for her on the cross of Calvary. What wife would not want to submit to a husband who loved her in that sacrificial way? I have to confess, sadly, that I have not always loved my wife in that kind of way. Yet it has been aptly observed that God's commandments are God's enablings. God never asks us to do anything for which He is unable to supply the strength and grace we need. As husbands, let us seek that help from Him.

But a wife may say, "I could readily submit to a husband who loved me in that special kind of way, but my husband is not like that." God's word is still "Submit". Yet the wife can turn to our loving, omnipotent God and ask Him to make her husband a better man than he is.

Children

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honour your father and mother,' which is the first commandment with promise: that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth" (Ephesians 6:1-3).

In one of the amazing verses in the Bible, we read of the Lord Jesus as a boy of 12, "Then He went down with them [Mary and Joseph] and came to Nazareth, and was subject [or, obedient] to them" (Luke 2:51). But then, as the carol, '*Once in royal David's city*', reminds us, "For He is our childhood's pattern..."

But the command to obey is qualified by the words, "in the Lord". Where parental wishes clearly contradict the plain commands of Scripture, the child may well be called upon to act contrary to the parents' command. Peter and the other apostles, as they found themselves in such a conflict with the authorities, had to say, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). In some countries which are antagonistic to Christianity this may even lead to the child being turned out of the parental home.

We have already seen that the seemingly difficult command to wives is tempered by the constraint laid upon husbands. So here, this command to children is tempered by the command laid upon fathers.

Fathers

"And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

While God has committed this authority to fathers, and to mothers, for the upbringing of their children, the authority should be exercised in a way that does not antagonise the child. This will sometimes require sitting down with the child and carefully explaining the reasons for the command. In the original Greek words used, the emphasis on 'training' may well be on training by act, while the emphasis on 'admonition' is on training by word. In every case, the aim must be for the spiritual blessing of the child and, in the grace of God, the ultimate conversion of the child. This emphasis on spiritual blessing far outweighs other considerations such as health, education, sport and material success. At the same time, the Christian parent will want to exercise godly concern in each of these areas.

Thus God would establish the family unit where each member has his or her God-given role, thus building a stable family unit. In turn, that family unit becomes the building block for a stable society. Much of the breakdown in society today can be traced to the failure of the family unit to function as God intended it to.

We don't have time to deal with Ephesians 6:5-9. Take time to read these verses carefully. You will see that, however humdrum the work situation, it is still possible, either as an employee or an employer, to shine for the Lord Jesus. "Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men" (Colossians 3:23).

Two rooms in a house each had a candle in them. Late at night, one room was lit up but the other was in darkness. Why? The reason is not difficult! One candle had been lit and was shining, burning itself up. The other candle remained unlit and unburned. Some time after John the Baptist had been executed by King Herod, the Lord Jesus described John in this significant way: "He was a burning and a shining light" (John 5:35). Note the order of those words: first, the burning and second, the shining. So it is with our humble candle. The chemical reactions occurring as the candle wax is burned, result in the emission of light. There is no light without burning! And so in the spiritual realm, there can be no real shining for Jesus apart from burning, apart from sacrifice.

Do we ask, "Is that too great a price to pay?" Think about Calvary and the price the Lord Jesus paid when He died for your sins and mine. Then let us seek His help so that the light of His life in us might shine out for His glory and the blessing of those around us.

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