

THE MEANING OF LIGHT AND DARKNESS
IN EPHESIANS 5:8-14

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Light and darkness are two words that are used in the biblical record from Genesis to Revelation. They are two words that are used by God in the biblical record to communicate to mankind important information. In most instances light and darkness are used together as opposites. This can be seen from the use of any Bible concordance.

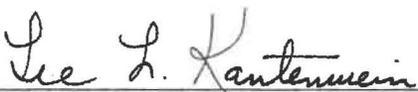
This study was done by evaluating, to some degree, the usage in Scripture of light and darkness as a whole. In the Old Testament אור appears both as a noun "to shine" or "to enlighten." As a noun, אור is understood both in a natural sense, the light of the heavenly bodies, etc., and also metaphorically as denoting the nature of God, the nature and work of Christ, and the nature and work of the believer. In the New Testament, φῶς , light, also appears either in the natural or the metaphorical realm as was evident in the Old Testament. In the New Testament the subject of light is more developed than the Old Testament. One significant usage of φῶς in the New Testament is its use in the description of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, who as light, reveals God the Father and is the sole means for man's spiritual understanding.

In the Old Testament the primary word for darkness is חשך . It is understood in a natural sense, the darkness of night, and metaphorically as denoting man's sinfulness, grief, ignorance of God, and his nature as a sinner. In the New Testament, σκότος , is used either in the natural or the metaphorical realm as it was in the Old Testament.

This study sought the meaning of light and darkness in Ephesians 5:8-14. Darkness, (1) denotes sin as a state of the unbeliever; (2) and σκότος denotes the sinful works that the unbeliever does and the believer should not do. φῶς , (1) light, denotes the believer's state; (2) φῶς denotes the believer's responsibility to those in darkness; and (3) φῶς denotes what the believer can become through the light of the gospel.

It is the conclusion of this writer that darkness refers primarily to the unbeliever and sins. Light refers as an opposite, to the believer and the gospel message which he has in his life by deed and word. It is this message of light that darkness is opposed to and changed into light.

Accepted by the Faculty of Grace Theological Seminary
in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree
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Adviser

PREFACE

The objective in view in the writing of this paper has been to determine the exact meaning of the terms light and darkness in Ephesians 5:8-14. A real learning experience has been realized from the study of this passage of Scripture, and others in connection with it. The results of the investigation are not original with the writer. But as the meaning was sought out, a great practical truth has come to the forefront. The believer, as a child of light, has a great responsibility to the light which he has received. This much is clear in Ephesians 5:8-14.

A real sense of indebtedness is felt toward the faculty of Grace Theological Seminary for their stand on the Scripture. The writer is grateful for the teaching which he has received.

Deep appreciation is expressed to Dr. Lee L. Kantenwein who, as faculty adviser, has offered valuable suggestions in the preparation of this paper, and has shown much grace in working with the writer.

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INTRODUCTION

Light and darkness are two of the most common things on earth. They are so common that men take them for granted. Though they are common, that does not mean they are not important. Without light and darkness a number of very important things would not take place on earth. Man would not be able to live. There would be no food, no growth, no heat and no fuel, to mention just a few examples. Also, sight would be impossible, and communication as it is known, would be greatly reduced.

God, in His Word, seeks to communicate to man about spiritual things, which are also essential. In doing so, He often uses figures of speech. This is for the sake of clarity and emphasis, not confusion.

One figure God uses is that of darkness. This emphasizes something that is essential from God's standpoint. Darkness is used to refer to night time (Gen 1:5; Acts 27:23). The most common use is as a figure of speech. The figure is that of a metaphor. And it is used to refer to the spiritual condition of mankind, that of sin. And darkness is used to refer to the works of mankind, that of sins (Rom 2:19; Eph 5:11).

Another figure that God uses is that of light. This emphasizes something that is essential from God's

standpoint. Light is usually used as a metaphor. It is one of the few figures that is used consistently of God Himself and the Lord Jesus Christ. Light is used figuratively to refer to moral purity, knowledge and goodness as the opposite of evil. Light is also used of communication from God to man in the form of revelation in Scripture (1 John 1:5-7; 2:9).

Of the many views of Ephesians 5:8-14, one matter which is clearly stated is: God is telling man something which is absolutely essential for the church and for the individual believer. The city of Ephesus needed light because of the gross corruption which existed. This can be seen from the sins that were listed by Paul in the epistle: stealing (4:28), fornication, uncleanness (5:3), and idolatry (Acts 19:23-27). If Ephesus were to be reached with the Gospel and if the believers were to receive all that God had for them, they were to be active participants in giving God's light in a dark city like Ephesus.

It is possible for Christians, by their life as light in the Lord, to reprove the darkness about them. Also, because they have the word of God, which is light (Eph 5:13), they can reprove darkness about them. Does this reproof of darkness change the darkness into light? According to some interpreters, yes. And according to some, the answer to this question is no. Whatever the meaning of light and darkness in Ephesians 5:8-14, God is talking about something very important.

The method of seeking an interpretation of this passage will be to study the biblical use of light and darkness. Second, a study will be made of the background of the letter. Third, the context in which the problem of light and darkness is found will be studied. After this, an examination of the major interpretations will be done. Emphasis will be placed on the grammar and syntax of the passage. Finally, the writer will present his interpretation and hopefully a reasonable conclusion.

CHAPTER I

THE BIBLICAL USE OF LIGHT AND DARKNESS

The words light and darkness are used many times throughout the biblical record. One cannot read the Bible without being confronted with the words light and darkness hundreds of time. A good deal of Scripture can be understood with a proper knowledge of the biblical usage of these words.

Biblical Words for Light

Words in the Old Testament

The basic words that are used for light in the Old Testament are the following. אֹר is the dominant word, and means to shine, the break of day, or light of day, or starlight (2 Sam 2:32). מְאֹר refers to the sun and moon as abodes of light (Gen 1:14-16). Further terms are נֹר, light (2 Sam 21:17), and נִפְּע, to shine (Job 10:22). But אֹר is the most frequent word used for light. It has about 200 references in the Old Testament.¹

Words in the New Testament

In the New Testament the words for light are the following. Among the nouns there is φῶς, translated light.

¹Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, "φῶς," by Rolf Rendtroff, 9:318-19.

This is a Greek word which denotes a luminary or light giver. φωτισμός denotes illumination. And φωστήρ, which means brightness or luster, is used of the light of the moon or of a lamp. φωτίζω means to shine or give light.

φῶς, the word that is most often used to refer to light in most forms, is the word that is used in Ephesians 5:8-14. The case ending is the determining factor of its use in the sentence as in Ephesians 5:8-14.¹

With this understanding of the words from the Old and New Testaments, it would be helpful to the paper to do a brief study of the use of light in the Bible.

The Biblical Use of Light

The record of the creation of light by God is recorded in Genesis 1:3-6. It was created by Him and was separate from Him. God is sovereign over light. Light is a created thing and subject to the control of God. This was the first use of light in the Bible, and the use was literal. Light referred to the physical, experienced brightness, and the sphere of natural life with the rhythm of day and night as we know it today.

The creation of light gave way for orderly progress and for productivity. It is from this creation of light

¹ Joseph H. Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), pp. 662-63.

that are derived the many uses of the word light in the Bible and in the secular world.¹

The first way light is used in the Bible is to refer to the normal process of day and night. The day time was the time of light when men went forth to their work, when they arose from sleep and when the sun shone (Ps 104:22,23). The second way light is used is to refer to artificial light. This is necessary because man does not always find natural light sufficient for his needs (Exod 25:5; Luke 15:8).

Light is sometimes used in the Bible to refer to miraculous light. This is light that is not the light of normal day as we know it, but is light that is brought about by the power of God. It is supernatural.

There are six references to miraculous light in the Bible, three in each of the Testaments. First is the Light which illuminated the Israelites while the Egyptians were left in darkness (Exod 10:23). Second is the light at the burning bush by which God made Himself known to Moses (Exod 3:2). Third is the pillar of fire in which God manifested Himself as leader of Israel (Exod 13:21). The fourth light is the light which was seen at the announcement of the birth of the Lord Jesus (Luke 2:9). Fifth is the light which surrounded Saul of Tarsus on the Road to Damascus at his call and conversion. This light made a lasting impression on Saul

¹C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Pentateuch, in Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), 1:49-52.

as he gave it in his testimony years later (Acts 9:3; 22:6; 26:13). And finally, the light that was seen at and was a part of the Lord Jesus' transfiguration (Matt 17:2).¹

The largest use of the words for light in the Bible is figurative. It is used as a figure of speech most often as a metaphor.

A metaphor is an implied comparison, and is of more frequent occurrence in all languages than simile. It differs from the latter in being a briefer and more pungent form of expression, and in turning words from their literal meaning to a new and striking use.²

As a figure of speech, it is used of the revelation of God either in His Word or in nature. Paul used the light of nature as an illustration of the light of the Gospel as the counterpart of the light of creation (2 Cor 4:4-6). The gospel is the revelation of God to man, not man's revelation to God. It is the light of revelation that is used of Christ when Jesus is spoken of as the light of the world in the Gospel of John (John 12:35-36). It is the light of revelation that Christ is referred to in John 1:4-5, as the light that gives to men the proper knowledge of the ways of God.³

Light is used symbolically to refer to character. It is used in this sense when it speaks of God metaphorically as being light. This is a reference to His holiness.

¹Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, "Light," by H. J. S. Blaney, 3:30.

²Milton S. Terry, Biblical Hermeneutics (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), p. 258.

³Merrill Tenney, John: The Gospel of Belief (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1948), pp. 65-66.

It is in this category that God is referred to as the father of lights (Jas 1:17). The believer, because he possesses the nature of God, is referred to as a child of light. And according to 1 John 1:6, when he walks in fellowship with God he is in the Light. Therefore, the Christian life is an enlightened life which shows knowledge and wisdom in regard to Christ and His work of salvation. The believer has a responsibility to exercise his influence as a child of light because he is enlightened.¹

Because the believer has the nature of light as the child of God, he is to allow this light to influence the lives of those that are in darkness around him (Matt 5:14; Eph 5:8-14). It is a command of Christ to those who are children of light to let their light shine that men may see their good works and give glory to their Father who is in heaven (Matt 5:15).

Biblical Use of Darkness

Old Testament Words for Darkness

The words for darkness in the Old Testament are in Hebrew. **אָפֶקֶת** is the basic root word, and it is translated darkness. The cognates are used to translate darkness also: **אָפֶקֶת**, to cause darkness (Ps 139:12); **אָפֶקֶת**, darkness, calamity, misery, ignorance (Job 37:9); and **אָפֶקֶת**, darkness (Dan 2:22). **אָפֶקֶת** is another basic root word which with its cognates is translated darkness. **אָפֶקֶת** means dark or obscure (Amos 5:20):

¹Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia, "Light," by Blaney, 3:258.

הַלְּחָשׁ means thick darkness, or misfortune; and לְחָשׁ is translated darkness (Josh 24:7).¹ These are the two dominant roots with some of their forms that are translated darkness in the Old Testament.

New Testament Words for Darkness

The Greek words that are most often translated darkness in the New Testament are σκότος, σκοτία, σκοτώ, σκοτίω, σκοτεινός. This group is used to translate the word in the literal sense and in the symbolical sense. Often times, along with the context, it is depended upon the word light for a full understanding.²

Biblical Use of Darkness

Darkness is used in the Bible to refer to natural darkness which is the absence of light. Darkness is used to identify the twelve hours after sunset, more or less, which is called night (Gen 1:5).

The term for darkness first appears in the Bible to refer to the chaotic condition of the world before God created light (Gen 1:2,3). The division that came from this resulted in the natural day and night.³

¹ Benjamin Davidson, The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), pp. 412-19.

² Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, "σκοτος," by Ernst Fuchs, 7:423.

³ International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, "Diana," by Max L. Margolis, 2:789.

The word darkness is used biblically in the symbolical sense. Metaphorically it is used to symbolize distress (Job 5:14), death (1 Sam 2:9), human ignorance (Job 19:8; 1 John 2:11), and moral depravity and its punishment (Prov 2:13; Rom 13:12). Darkness is used symbolically in the spiritual sphere to refer to sin, godlessness and everything that is opposed to God. Darkness is used to represent the condition of the spiritually unenlightened (John 1:4-5). Those who are unbelievers are referred to directly as darkness (Eph 5:8). Scripturally, the world of men are represented as loving darkness (John 3:19-20).¹

Light and Darkness

Light and darkness are usually used together in Scripture. They are used as opposites. However, darkness is more dependent on light for understanding. Light usually is referring to the kingdom of Christ, or God, and His people (Luke 16:8; John 1:4). Darkness usually refers to the kingdom of sin and evil, with the people who are in it. And Satan is the head of the kingdom of darkness (Eph 5:8; 6:12). In the biblical record, light is superior to darkness and will someday expell the darkness (Rev 21:25-27).

Summary

Light and darkness are two often used words throughout the Scriptures. As can be seen from this brief study,

¹ Ibid.

the largest use biblically is in the symbolical sense. This is not to say that the natural literal meanings of the words are not important. If it were not for the literal there could be no proper understanding of the symbolical. The words are used consistently throughout both Testaments.

The passage in Ephesians 5:8-14 is dealing with the realm of light and darkness and the believer's relation and responsibility as a child of light. The usage of light and darkness in this passage is in keeping with general biblical usage. However, the context, and study of various interpretations must be considered to get the exact understanding.

CHAPTER II

ESSENTIAL BACKGROUND

In relation to the problem, or problems with which this thesis is concerned, there are some things in Ephesians which are important to know in order to better understand the problem and to reach a reasonable conclusion. First, it is important to know something about the author of the letter. In this thesis the Apostle Paul is understood to be the author. This is the general opinion of most of the reference works that were consulted. Second, one must consider the recipients of the letter, the church at Ephesus. Third, the city of Ephesus must be considered. Fourth, the purpose of the letter must be examined. An understanding of these background materials will greatly aid in the understanding of the problem or problems, and their possible conclusions.

Concerning the Author, Paul

In Ephesians, Paul claims the same title which the Lord Jesus Christ gave to the twelve disciples. This title, apostle, has the meaning of someone called and sent with the authority to teach, or to teach with authority. This authority is that of God Himself. What the apostle is

writing is the mind of God in the sense of 2 Peter 1:20-21. It is by the authority of Jesus Christ, in whose name he had preached the gospel at Ephesus initially (Acts 19), that he is now writing this letter. Christ was the One who established the Church through the instrument of the Apostle Paul. Paul is writing with this consciousness, hence, the statement, "apostle by the will of God." He is not just writing his opinion, but the will and words of God.¹

Another point about Paul's life which has bearing on the letter is his personal background. Paul was a Jew. He states this in Philippians 3:1-7. He said that he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews. In his personal testimony in Acts 26:5, Paul points out that he was a Pharisee. Though a Jew, and a Pharisee, with knowledge of God, he still was in a state of darkness until he was brought to the light of the Gospel of Christ. What he says about light and darkness is not just by revelation, but by personal experience as well. The fact that Paul was a Jew is significant in understanding his use of light and darkness. This is important because some think that the source of material is other than Bible history. His primary understanding of these terms would be biblical and not secular.²

Because Paul was the founder of the Ephesian Church and because of his apostleship, he had a personal and

¹Thayer, Lexicon, p. 68.

²International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, "Paul the Apostle," by A. T. Robertson, 4:2276-77.

professional interest in the church's development. Indeed, he had gone to Ephesus with the expressed purpose of carrying out his life's calling to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. He had preached the light of the Gospel of Christ at Ephesus. The purpose of his writing the letter was an extension of the purpose of his having gone to Ephesus.

Concerning the Recipients

A second point of background is the recipients of the letter. The first verse of chapter one gives three things concerning the recipients. First, they are called the saints. Second, they are called faithful. Third, they are said to be in Christ Jesus.

The plural term saints, ἅγιος, is not referring to someone who is spiritually superior. It is referring to those who are set apart to God. This is the basic meaning of the word. All those who were in the Church were saints, set apart to God. Paul's statement in Ephesians 2:1 and 5:8 describes the former state of these saints as one of death and separation from God. Their state is described as being one of former darkness, and therefore, separated from the light. But now, they were set apart to God.¹

Next, they are called faithful, πιστός. This adjective, faithful, can be taken either in the active sense, meaning trusting or having faith, or it can be taken passively, meaning to be trustworthy. Either meaning would

¹Thayer, Lexicon, pp. 6-7.

be applicable to the recipients. Trusting could be more applicable to the recipients having believed the Gospel. Trustworthy could apply to the recipients in doctrine and the practical aspects of the Epistle. As saints they would be both trusting in God and trustworthy in what God had committed to them.¹

Third, Paul refers to the readers as being in Christ. This is a term which is used throughout the New Testament to refer to those who are Christians. It speaks of the oneness of Christ with His people and He with them. It is parallel with the thought in Ephesians 5:8-14, light in the Lord. It is because of this vital relationship that the letter was written, both doctrinally and practically. Being in Christ and being light in the Lord has a twofold obligation. One is to know something, and the other is to be and do something. The passage with which this thesis is concerned is found in the section of being and doing.²

Concerning the City, Ephesus

Next, the matter of the city where the church of the Ephesians existed. Ephesus was a city of great economic, political, cultural and spiritual importance.

¹Kenneth Wuest, Ephesians and Colossians in the Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1953), p. 19.

²Thayer, Lexicon, pp. 672-73.

Economic Importance

Economically, the city was very wealthy. This brought trade from all over the ancient world. Also, because it was situated on two rivers, it had revenue from the river and sea from a thriving fishing industry. It also was a very prosperous city because the land around the rivers was fertile. Ephesus was the hub of much economic activity. As such, it was the home of many who were rich and many who would become rich. The wealth of the city was used to support the government and the cultural and religious worship of the city.¹ The wealth was used to support rapacious tax collectors and moneylenders who like vultures lived in Ephesus.

Political Importance

Ephesus was also a city of great political importance. Ephesus was the capital of the Asian province under the Romans. The Romans received the city from the will of Attalus III in 133 B.C. During this time the Roman empire was still being plagued with wars for independence. Ephesus participated in several revolts, the last of which was when Mithridates invaded Ionia in 88 B.C. Rome put down the revolt. Ephesus was punished heavily with taxation. But after the empire was more firmly established, Ephesus enjoyed a long period of peace and prosperity. It

¹Charles F. Pfeiffer and Howard F. Vos, The Wycliffe Historical Geography of Bible Lands (Chicago: Moody Press, 1967), pp. 358-59.

was in this period of peace and prosperity that Paul came and preached the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.¹ Ephesus was the home of the provincial governor of Asia, and many other lesser political figures.

Ephesus was governed by a town clerk (Acts 19:35). He was dominant in the political life of the city. He chaired meetings of the assembly and helped to draft decrees to be submitted to it. He was in charge of money that was given to the people. He was responsible to the Roman governor of the province. If the town clerk could not maintain order in the city, he could lose his position, and the town could lose its freedom (Acts 19:35). It was the town clerk that presided over the assembly in the theater after the riot caused by the silversmith at Ephesus over the preaching of Paul in the city.²

Cultural Importance

The city was a great cultural center with the temple of Diana being one of the seven wonders of the world. Also, Ephesus was the site of schools on the university level, as well as having a library. It also had many sporting events, with its own stadium. It was at Ephesus that Paul fought with beasts. Fighting with beasts was one of the sporting activities that went on in the stadium, or arena (1 Cor 15:32). Not only was the temple a place of

¹ Ibid., pp. 359,364-65.

² Ibid., pp. 364-65.

worship, but it acted as a museum in which the best of sanctuaries and most beautiful paintings were preserved.¹

Religious Importance

The religious and spiritual importance of the city probably outweighs all of its other importances. It also gives greater significance to the economic, political and cultural aspects of the city. Ephesus was the center of the worship of the mother goddess, Diana. Indeed, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world was the temple of Diana at Ephesus. This goddess was not a local goddess, but was worshipped throughout the ancient world, and particularly in the province of Asia.²

So important was this religious and spiritual shrine that the building of the temple had been done by rich and poor alike, both contributing large sums to this project. Also, the importance is seen in that the temple was used as a banking system and for the storage of valuables. It reminds one of what Jesus said, "Where your heart is, there will your treasures be" (Matt 6:19-21). This was true of the worshippers of Diana. In connection with its wealth is illustrated the truth of Scripture, "The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil" (1 Tim 6:10).³

¹ Ibid., pp. 364-66.

² International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, "Diana," by E. J. Banks, 2:961.

³ Pfeiffer and Vos, Wycliffe Historical Geography of Bible Lands, pp. 364-66.

Indeed, it was from the wealth that came from selling the images of the goddess that brought Paul's ministry personally to a close at Ephesus. According to the account of Paul's ministry in Acts 19, Paul's ministry was so effective that the sale of the images had begun to decline. People were leaving the false worship and coming to the true God through the preaching of the Gospel. The silver-smiths at Ephesus caused a riot. And they pinpointed Paul for causing the lost business because he said that Diana was no god, and therefore the images were not gods either. After the riot subsided, Paul decided to leave the city.¹

The worship of Diana, the Mother goddess, was sin in itself. Sinful acts of immorality were practiced as a part of this worship. According to history, the temple was the place of 1000 sacred prostitutes who committed acts of immorality in hopes of inspiring the gods to give good crops and animal birth. They did not know the true God. The worship of Diana did not exercise any moral restraining influence over the lives of its worshippers. The worship itself was nothing but immorality. The list of sins that Paul mentioned in Ephesians 4:20-32 and 5:3-6, were characteristic of these worshippers.²

Probably the greatest source of darkness in the world is false religion. This is the violation of the first three

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 365.

² International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, "Diana," by Banks, 2:96f.

commandments given in Exodus 20. The first commandment is not to have any god before the True God. The second commandment is to not make any graven images. And the third commandment is to not take the name of the Lord in vain. The worshippers of the goddess Diana, broke all three commandments, as a part of their worship. This was gross darkness. But it was through the preaching of the Gospel of Christ, the light, that the city of Ephesus was transformed.¹

Concerning the Message

A final note of introductory matter concerns the message of the letter. This letter, unlike so many of the other letters of Paul and the other New Testament writers, does not concern a particular problem. This is unlike Galatians, which agreed by most commentators, is directed against legalism, and like Timothy, which was given to pastoral duties, and like Colossians, which was concerned with gnosticism. Ephesians does not have a specific problem to which it is addressed. Paul's purpose was to confirm the Ephesians in their faith. He wanted to exhort them concerning belief and duty.

Paul's line of truth in Ephesians deals with the believer's position through grace. Paul does this by giving a picture of God's glorious redemptive grace toward the church in the work of Christ Jesus (Eph 1-3). Paul

¹Pfeiffer and Vos, Wycliffe Historical Geography of Bible Lands, p. 363.

wrote to show that the church is the body of Christ with Christ as the Head (Eph 1:22-23; 4:4,16): Paul wrote to show that the church is a unified body, whether Jews or Gentiles, to show the glory and wisdom of God to the world (Eph 2:13,18).¹

Chapters 4-6 were written with the emphasis on exhortation based on the application of the truth stated in chapters 1-3. The believer is responsible to live in accordance to his exalted position in Christ (Eph 4-6). This section gives detailed instruction concerning unity (ch 4), consistent Christian life (chs 4-5), the home life (ch 5), and spiritual warfare (ch 6).²

Summary

Paul, as the founder of the Ephesus church, had a personal and professional concern in the church's spiritual growth. As the saints of God, the Christians at Ephesus had an obligation to the city in which they lived. The political, economic, cultural and religious importance of the city emphasized the need for the believer to live as a child of light. Ephesus was a city of great spiritual and moral darkness. The message Paul wrote to the believers in Ephesus was the only way through which the darkness of that city could be changed.

¹William Hendriksen, Exposition of Ephesians, in New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1967), pp. 62-66.

²ibid.

CHAPTER III

THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT

The immediate context of light and darkness, with which this paper is concerned, consists of verses eight through fourteen of Ephesians chapter five. The extended context is at least 4:17-5:21. In this section Paul continues his exhortation to the Ephesians in general and specific terms to let their behavior conform to the gospel message which was explained in chapters one through three. There Paul has explained God's glorious work of election through the redemptive work of Christ on the cross on behalf of the universal church, of which the local church at Ephesus was a part. In the immediate context, 5:8-14, the particular urging of Paul is for their lives to conform to the message they have received. The exhortation is stated in terms of the Ephesians walking as children of light, for they are no longer darkness. A brief explanation of 5:8-14 is in order that the problems and interpretations of them can be better understood.

The theme of this section (5:8-14) is the contrast between light and darkness. This is the section where the problem of light and darkness is found. Almost all commentators of Ephesians understand the idea of light and

darkness to be the theme. A few are Hendriksen, Stott and Hodge.¹

Exhortation--Verse 8

Paul starts this section with an imperative--
ὥστέκνα φωτὸς περιπατεῖτε--"Walk as children of light." The use of the imperative is prominent throughout this section. This is one of the reasons that chapters four through six are considered the practical section of the letter. The command to "walk as children of light" is based on the supposition that goes before this clause (v. 8), "For you were once darkness, but now (you are) light in the Lord." The word γὰρ ties verse eight in with the larger context of verses three through seven of chapter five. It explains what he had in mind when he said they were formerly in darkness. According to Abbott, the fact of Paul using ἦτε, "ye were," which is the imperfect indicative, is to place a strong emphasis on their past state.² This also emphasizes their present state. The fact that Paul uses the word darkness without the article also adds to the strength of this statement. Without the article, darkness (ἡτε . . .

¹William Hendriksen, Exposition of Ephesians, in New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1967), p. 227; John R. W. Stott, God's New Society, the Message of Ephesians (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), p. 198; Charles Hodge, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians (New York: Robert Carter and Brother, 1856), p. 292.

²T. K. Abbott, The Epistles of Paul to the Ephesians and Colossians in International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), p. 152.

σκότος) is used as a figure of speech. It is usually used as a metaphor. By stating their former condition, Paul is emphasizing their life and character as it was then. This emphasizes not only that they were in darkness but also that darkness was in them. The darkness that is spoken of in verse eight refers to the lifestyle of the Ephesians before they became light in the Lord. The term darkness refers to their ignorance of God and His ways, especially concerning his revelation of salvation. 2 Corinthians 4:4,6 and Ephesians 4:18 are parallel passages concerning the unsaved being in the power of darkness. The darkness refers to their conduct of life, not just their ignorance of God and His ways. The things that Paul has listed in 4:4-17 and the first seven verses of chapter five are the works of darkness. Some that are listed in the larger context are bitterness, wrath, anger, fornication, uncleanness, covetousness. These are the things of darkness, sins, which were formerly part of the Ephesian lifestyle. They were, during that time, part of that realm or sphere, which is called darkness. This realm is controlled by the prince of darkness, according to Ephesians 6:12. The realm of darkness is characterized by alienation from the life of God and a state of spiritual death. This is what they had been, and it is the negative side of the picture. And now Paul, in the next clause of verse 8, tells them of what they are now, and how they are to act that their lives will be consistent with what they have become.

They had become light in the Lord. The νῦν, now, connects this thought, νῦν δὲ ὡς ἐν κυρίῳ, with the thought in the first clause of verse 8 dealing with darkness. It is a contrast to what they are as to what they were. The absence of the verb "to be" in the Greek text is not a textual problem. Rather, it is a grammatical tool to place emphasis upon the idea stated.¹ In this clause, as they had formerly partaken of the nature and practice of darkness, they are to partake of the nature and character of light. They were not only to be in the light, but also the light was to be in them. The last two words of this clause, ἐν κυρίῳ, give the source of the light. The light that was among the Ephesians and what was in them was from God. The title, Lord, refers to the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ--the only true source of light as to the knowledge of God and moral purity. All that Paul described concerning the purpose and plan of God in Ephesians 1-3, might be described as light in the sense of revelation. It is only in the Lord and in connection with him that the Ephesians were now light themselves. Hendriksen explains this as their now belonging to the realm of light. This is the true knowledge of God and of righteousness and holiness.² This is the realm where the Lord Jesus Christ, the Light of the world (John 8:12), is Lord and master. Many commentators

¹ Ibid.

² Hendriksen, Exposition of Ephesians, p. 231.

take this to lay the groundwork for Paul giving the imperative which follows, "walk as children of light" (v. 8).

In saying "walk as children of light," Paul is telling them to let their lives, conduct and witness be consistent with what they have become. That is light in the Lord. Every word in this clause calls to mind a figure of speech. This is to clarify what the writer had in mind. The main idea behind children is that of nature and imitators.¹ The word for children here, τέκνα, is used of small children. It assumes a parent. And in this passage, though unspoken, one can safely say that the father of the children of light is God (Jas 1:17). The idea can equally apply to the Lord Jesus Christ. One of the basic characteristics of children is to imitate their parents. This metaphor is one of those figures of speech that is universally true, under normal circumstances. It therefore lends itself to communicate the truth of God that one of the main responsibilities of the children of light is to walk, conduct their lives, as children of light. They are to imitate their Father, God.

Walking as Light--Verse 9--Positively

In the next verse (v. 9), Paul elaborates on what it means to walk as children of light. He uses yet another figure of speech which is that of a tree bearing fruit. This figure is used along with the figure of light. Paul

¹Thayer, Lexicon, p. 617.

possibly wrote this verse to explain the unspoken question that might have arisen in the minds of the readers of this letter. How can I know that I am walking as a child of light? The answer is, light produces fruit.

He mentions three terms that seem to be general, yet specific enough to cause one to see and know whether his life is consistent or not. They are goodness, righteousness and truth. These are positive. The first clause of verse ten gives another positive way of knowing whether a person is walking in the light--"Proving what is the will of the Lord." Stott takes this clause in addition to what was said in verse nine as a test of children of light.¹ Another positive side of the child of light's life will be a willingness to prove what is pleasing to the Lord. On the positive side, they are to produce fruit.

Walking as Light--Verse 11--Negatively

On the negative side, they are to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness (5:11). This admonition is a reminder of what Paul said in 5:7, "have no fellowship with them," speaking of the sins that had been mentioned in verses 3-6 of chapter five. The negative admonition given in this verse is directed against the works of darkness. It means the works that belong to darkness. This is brought out by the grammatical form called the genitive of possession: τοῦ σκότους. Darkness is used

¹Stott, God's New Society, p. 199.

in the spiritual and moral sense. This would mean such things as immorality, impurity, greed, filthiness, and silly talk (Eph 4:31; 5:3-4). This is part of the larger context of this chapter. These are the works that belong to the realm of darkness. All such works are described as being unfruitful. They are works, men labor to do them, but they are unfruitful and unprofitable. They do not glorify God, and do not win their neighbor over to the realm of light. Neither do they produce peace and inner satisfaction and holiness.

Walking as Light--5:11b-14--A Responsibility

The believer's responsibility as a child of light to the works of darkness, may be explained by one word, ἐλέγχετε, "reprove" (5:11b). The believer is to take a positive stand against darkness, and be active against it. He is to reprove, to point out the wrongness of the works of darkness done by those who are in darkness.¹

Verse 13 gives the means by which this reproof is to be done, τὰ δὲ πάντα ἐλεγχόμενα ὑπο τοῦ φωτός: "But all things, having been reproved, are by the light made manifest." Light, φῶς, is used here of the message of the gospel. It is the message of the gospel that the believer used to reprove the works of darkness and the men that do

¹Thayer, Lexicon, p. 202.

works of darkness. When they are reprov'd, their deeds are made manifest for what they are.¹

Summary

Thus far, in these verses of this context, Paul has made clear that a person cannot be part light and part darkness. He cannot, or should not, be a participant in light and darkness. A person is either a believer or an unbeliever. Those who are in the light cannot, must not, take part in the unfruitful works of darkness.

The Problems Considered

However, are the children of light to completely withdraw themselves from any contact at all with those who are functioning in the realm of darkness? Are they to separate from the men of the world of darkness? Should they become hermits? Or should they, as the church has done in times past, withdraw behind walls and become monks? There is a time period in history when the church did just this, hoping as it were, to avoid the darkness in the world and in the lives of people.

But we have clear instructions in Scripture from the Lord concerning this. Christ prayed that His followers would be kept from the world while being in it (John 17). Even as He was in the world, yet not a part of its darkness, so must His people be. Paul points out in 2 Corinthians that the believer is not to separate completely, as though

¹ Ibid., p. 662.

they were not part of the world (2 Cor 5:9-13). The believer is in the world and has a mission to fulfill. His responsibility as light in the Lord is given in the last part of 5:8-14, namely, verses 11b-14. This section of Scripture is disputed by Bible scholars as to the exact interpretation. That the believer of Ephesus and of all time had a responsibility in relation to light is absolutely clear. However, the nature of this responsibility and the results of its exercise is what is not clear.

The problems in this passage center around the main verbs and their objects. They are problems which involve grammar and syntax. Some theological questions concerning the nature and the quality of lights and the relation of light and darkness also develop. The first problem is concerned with the word translated rebuke, or reprove, **ἐλέγχετε**. It is a problem of translation and interpretation and syntactical relationship. In connection with this problem there are two views which are closely related, but different enough to make two distinct views. In connection with this problem is the identification of the antecedents to the pronouns that are found in connection with the main verbs. The second problem has to do with the verb manifest and its object, light. From the complete passage there is also the problem of philosophy and theology which explains the terms light and darkness from their respective presuppositions.

With the understanding of the writer and the nature of the city, it is safe to assume that Paul's purpose in dealing with light and darkness in Ephesians 5:8-14, is due to his continuing concern for the city through the church. Indeed, the city is the church's responsibility. The city needed the light that the gospel could bring. For darkness was a part of the life of the city. This is clearly seen in the wealth, and the evil that it brings, and the idol worship, which was the height of darkness.

Because of the centrality of Ephesus, it was crucial that the believers fulfill their responsibility as light in the Lord.

Summary

Chapter one gives the general discussion of light and darkness and their biblical usage. Chapter two gives the essential background concerning the author, recipient, the city and the message of the letter. Chapter three gives a discussion of the context of the problem of light and darkness. With this background material, it is possible to consider the different interpretations and the reasons for them. The different interpretations agree on the general meaning of the context of the problem of light and darkness. The different interpretations disagree on the meaning and application of light to darkness as used in Ephesians 5:8-14. They also disagree on the results of the uses of the light in reference to darkness. These different interpretations are given in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

INTERPRETATIONS

There are six basic views of Ephesians 5:8-14 given in this paper. They are the expose, double exposure, reprove and transform, reprove profession Christian, reprove the works of darkness, and the light transforms interpretations. They will be considered in this chapter.

The Expose Interpretation

The first interpretation of this passage is termed the expose interpretation. There are several variations of this view, but this one only sees one problem of interpretation in this passage and this has to do with the verb **ἐλέγχετε**. It is translated to mean reprove by most translators but expose by this interpretation. The problem, according to this interpretation, is to what extent the believer reading Paul's letter should reprove the works of darkness. As suggested by the name of the interpretation, the extent of the rebuke or reproof is that of exposing only. Everything else in this passage, 5:11-14, is subordinated to the idea of reproof. According to this view the **κρυφῆ γινόμενα** (vs. 12) is referring to the unfruitful works of darkness. The emphasis is on the works of darkness and not on the people who do the works. This view takes the

τὰ πάντα, all the things, in verse 13, to refer also to the works of darkness. In this respect, this view of the works of darkness is consistent throughout the whole passage.

In connection with this interpretation and the other views of 5:8-14 as well, there is a minor problem in understanding verse 12. Hendriksen, a major proponent of the expose view, says that the one who is ashamed of these "unmentionable horrors" that are done by the doers of darkness, are the exposers. "Where the Apostle tells the Ephesians to expose the works of darkness, does he not mean that they (and all the others of whom the letter was intended throughout the course of history) should expose them?"¹ So now he adds in one breath that it is a shame even to mention the secret practices. Is not the obvious meaning, one should expose them? For they are so very wicked that for anyone even to mention them is shameful. In answer to the question, if the sins are unmentionable, how then are they to be exposed, Hendriksen further adds that the exposing is to be by means of a life of light. That is by a life of goodness, righteousness and truth as mentioned in verse nine.²

Because this view places the emphasis of verses 8-14 on the exposure of deeds rather than persons, it does not deal with the problem of "is light" in verse fourteen. Rather, verse fourteen is explained in terms of further

¹Hendriksen, Exposition of Ephesians, pp. 235-36.

²ibid.

understanding the ideal of exposing the works of darkness. The things, πάντα, is taken to refer to the wicked practices. And being reprov'd, or exposed, is connected syntactically, ὑπο φωτὸς, "by the light." This is a descriptive genitive that modifies ἐλεγχόμενα. Therefore, the expose view understanding of this passage is when the wicked practices are exposed, they are manifested by the contrast of the conduct of the children of light. They are shown for what they really are. They are made visible.

From the expose explanation comes the understanding of the clause, "for everything that is made visible is light" (vs. 14). All the wicked practices of darkness are seen for what they really are. Again, as throughout this passage, the responsibility of those who are light, is to expose, bring to light, the works of darkness. Those who are light in the Lord should shine in the darkness to expose the darkness for what it is--evil, ungodly. They are to do this by the light which they are in the Lord. Hendriksen, who holds to the exposed interpretation, states it this way:

Paul's aim is to show that he who has renounced the wicked ways of the world should live a life consistent with his new standing. Therefore, instead of any longer taking part in the unfruitful works of darkness, he should emerge completely from his sleep and arise and withdraw in every respect from the wicked ways of the company of the spiritually dead. The blessed results will be that Christ will shine upon him. That would seem to be the meaning of this passage.¹

This is a good view of this passage of Scripture. It gives an acceptable interpretation. However, to limit the

¹ Ibid., p. 236.

meaning to the exposure of darkness, meaning sin, seems to overlook the purpose of the church, which is among other things, evangelism. The writer does not hold this view.

The Double Exposure Interpretation

There is another variation of the exposed theory. According to this interpretation, the basic understanding of **ἀλέγχετε** is reprove, throughout verses 8-14. This interpretation agrees that there is a contrast between light and darkness. It agrees that darkness refers to those things that are done by those who are unsaved. Darkness is being used in the moral and spiritual sense. This view agrees that the light refers to those who are saved (v. 8) or believers, and that the believer's responsibility as light in the Lord is to expose the works of darkness (v. 13). This is taken from **περιπατεῖτε**, which is the main verb of verse eight. However, at verse thirteen, this view takes a different understanding of the passage as to its meaning, application and extent. According to Stott, verses 13-14 elaborate the double value of a Christian's exposure of evil.

First, when anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible. This is always good. Darkness hides the ugly realities of evil. The light makes them visible. Then evil is seen for what it is without concealment or subterfuge. Secondly, anything that becomes visible is light. Paul's economy of words makes it difficult to be certain what he means by this statement. But he seems to be describing a second stage in what light does. It actually transforms what is illuminated into light. This may mean that Christians who lead a righteous life thereby restrain and reform evildoers. Yes, just as the Ephesians themselves are light (verse 8). Exposure sounds negative, showing people up for what they are, judgmental, condemning. And it is that. But the light

which exposes has positive evangelistic power also, the light of one could make another light. For it may bring people, as they see the ugliness of evil, to conviction of their sin and so to penitent faith in Jesus. This then is the twofold effect which a Christian's light has on prevailing darkness; it makes visible and it makes light.¹

This view is a possible view also. It does admit the problem in understanding what the apostle means by this light. And it does offer an acceptable interpretation from the text and from the historical background.

The Reprove and Transform Interpretation

Bruce comments on this passage and shows that he takes two positions on darkness, and two on the use of light (5:8-14). It might be best represented this way (his comments cover verses 12-14):

A distinction seems to be drawn between two discrepant classes of transgressions. Some are too foul to be mentioned by sanctified lips. These ranker abominations, like rotting carcasses, ought to be buried out of sight. But iniquities of a less heinous cast, compatible with a conscience not utterly seared, should be rebuked by shedding the light of heaven on their obliquity. Light lays bare its counterpole deformity in the very process of diffusion, robed in a beauty all its own. Its property is to act as a revelation, like the light of life its gleam symbolizes the mirrors. There are rank shames whose hearts are set in them to do evil best shunned with abhorrence as incurable moral lepers; but others by no means so besotted may be met with, not unsusceptible of enlightenment, sinners who may yet prove the raw material of saints. They are not impervious to admonition nor reprobates hardened against the entrance of the light, nor unaware of their myopic condition. To them its shimmer comes revealingly as an illuminant unmasking their malady in its true colours. They rank among those who shake off their lethargy, who come to the light (John 3:20) without ranklings of repugnance. Their case is hopeful; for to know ourselves diseased (and own it) is

¹Stott, God's New Society, pp. 200-01.

half our cure (Young). What is thus made manifest is light. Not because darkness in their case changes its nature, but because, convinced of their moral night, wishful yearnings are stirred within them for better things. To them we judge the summons to be addressed: "Awake thou that sleepest and Christ shall beam forth on thee," an inspired version apparently of the tenor of more than one direction of the Old Testament. They are in the track of day, emerging from the catacomb of sin's dark sepulchre, and pursuing that path with faces turned towards the light, the Son of Righteousness will rise upon them with healing in His wings; for that Light of Light is already up and the darkness recoiling and vanishing away (1 John 2:8). But it may be viewed as a clarion call to spiritual somnambulists in general, challenging them to resuscitation from the bed of sloth. We accept accordingly the modern rendering of this somewhat obtruse passage.¹

This view understands darkness in the moral and spiritual sense. Darkness is used to refer to those who are lost in sin. The hidden works are understood in terms of sins that are done by the unsaved and seems to be a category of those who are unreachable with the light of the gospel.

Light is used to represent the gospel message and its power to save. The believer is to hold the light forth that those who are in darkness might come to its life-giving beam.

One problem with this view is that it classifies those who are in darkness in two categories. One group can be saved, and the other group may not be, because of their hidden works of darkness. Only God knows who can and cannot be saved. And from this context, the responsibility of the

¹F. F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Ephesians and Colossians (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), pp. 121-22.

children of light is to shine wherever there is darkness. The results of this are up to God.

The Reprove Profession Christian

Interpretation

There is one view of this passage which is different from the other views altogether. The difference is that it takes this passage, Ephesians 5:8-14, to refer to the believer.

This interpretation emphasizes the difference between the light and the darkness. It holds that the main thought of this passage is a call to the professed believer of the church of Ephesus, and all ages, to separation from the world and to devotion to Christ.¹ The darkness that is spoken of in this passage refers to sin in general; it is not referring to two classes of sin. Those that are light in the Lord are the believers. 2 Corinthians 6:17-18, which talks about separation, is one parallel passage which is used as a proof-text. The word reprove is understood about the same as in other views. That is, the works of darkness must be reprovved with the light so they will be made clear for what they are--works of darkness. In the case of the sinner, this reproof could lead to him becoming light in the Lord.

However, it is verses 13 and 14 where the main idea of this interpretation is emphasized. The light is understood to mean the pure, holy, Godly life. It is these

¹H. A. Ironside, In the Heavens (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1979), pp. 257-59.

qualities of light that will reprove. A parallel passage is 1 John, chapter one. Here the Scripture says that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5). Since the believer is light ("is Light in the Lord"), the believer is to be like God. When one comes into the presence of God, his sin is made manifest. If the believer will turn on and turn up the light, he will make manifest the darkness that is in his midst. Verse 14 is taken as the conclusion to verses 12-13. Verse 14 is a call to the sleeping and dead in the church. These are the professing believers. They are called upon to let this message go further than their heads. They are addressed to take action. The believers are exhorted to come out from the dark, to be separate. They are to show by their lives that they are different from the unsaved about them. The believers possibly had hidden wrong, sin, in their lives, which needed to be put right. They are called upon to respond to the light in and about them, and the resulting blessing from the Lord will be theirs.¹

This view is a possible interpretation of this passage. However, to limit the interpretation or the application to the people within the church seems to be somewhat restrictive. It is true that works of darkness and things done in secret could have been practiced by the members of the Ephesian Church. The Lord said there would be wheat and tares mixed (Matt 13:25). And other Scriptures speak

¹ Ibid., p. 259.

of false teachers and false brethren (2 Peter 2:1-3). But the extended context back to chapter four would clearly assume that the works of darkness were done by those who were not part of the church. And the immediate context agrees with this. Paul says that they were darkness and were now light in the Lord.

And secondly, this passage seems to be more than a call to separation. It seems to be an exhortation to action in the reproof of the works of darkness. The pronouns "ye" and "them" would also substantiate this.

This view does represent a true teaching of the Scriptures, in general, but seems to be restrictive and misapplied in this context.

The Reprove the Works of Darkness

Interpretation

Another view of this passage is that of the reprove only theory. According to this theory, the primary function of the light in this passage is to reprove the works of darkness.

Like the view of expose only, the general understanding of the context up to verse 12 is the same. However, after this there are several significant differences in the understanding of some of the minor problems and the reasoning coming to the conclusions.

The reason that this view is explained in terms of reproof, or rebuke, is that one of the meanings of the Greek word ἐλέγχετε, as found in 5:11 and 13, is exposure. This

is taken by those who hold to this view to refer to the exposure of things, and not people. This interpretation places the emphasis on the reproof of the people and their deeds. This is a minor difference, nevertheless, it is a difference. But the view does not go so far as the others, to say that this reproof leads to conversion.

Concerning the first minor problem of shame in verse 12, this interpretation holds that it refers to the things that are done in secret. The shame is to those who do these things. The shame is not to the believer in speaking out these works of darkness. One who holds this view is Lenski. He states it this way:

The emphasis is on the adverb, secretly. Why do men hide such things? They thereby admit that such works are a disgrace to themselves. Our reproof is like the flash of light on these hidden works of darkness which expose all their shame. Alas, men are not ashamed before God who sees in secret (Matt 6:4); but they are ashamed before men when their deeds are exposed to the sight of men.¹

This view differs from the expose view which is similar in its understanding of the term, κρυφῆ, in secret. They agree that the term in secret matches the darkness, but it is not taken in the general sense. As Lenski points out again, "In secret limits the things done by them to the vile and filthy sins which Paul here deals. Sexual vices are not practiced in public; covetousness also hides itself from the

¹R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of Galatians, Ephesians and Philippians (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1946), p. 609.

public eye."¹ τὰ πάντα, verse 13, "all things," is taken to mean those things that are done in secret. "The Greek article is pointed back to the sins of darkness."²

According to this view, δὲ, verse 13, "but," introduces a parenthetical remark regarding the effect of applying the light in the work of reproof. δὲ is not taken adversely, but is taken as a further explanation of how the reproof is to be done. The light is explained in terms of the gospel in the life of the believers. The light of the gospel makes visible, makes things plain, brings them into public view. It shows them up for what they are. Therefore, φανεροῦται, "make manifest," of verse 13 is explained with the passive meaning, to make visible or plain; and ὑπο φωτός, as the agent that makes visible. This is the light. The "for," which is part of the last clause, is explained as the further explanation of everything that is made public is light. This use of light is not light in the Lord, which would refer to those that are in darkness becoming children of light. It simply means that the light is the revealing agent.

The light, Christ and His Word in the life of His people, is what performs the work of reproof. It shines on the secret vices of men when they are reproven by the children of light. Then these things of darkness become light.

¹ Ibid.

² Wuest, Ephesians and Colossians in the New Testament, p. 125.

that is, they are made visible. They are shown to be unfruitful works of darkness. This view does not say that the darkness is transformed, but only that it is shown up for what it is. The effect of the reproof is not the issue, according to this view. The issue is that the children of light must reprove sin and vice. This is one of their responsibilities as children of light.¹

One proof-text that is used to support this view is Ezekiel 33:8-9. God told the prophet to warn the wicked.

Next is the understanding of verse 14 in relation to this context. According to this view, the emphasis is on how the reproof is to be uttered. This is the reproof that is talked about in verses 3-13. As Lenski says, "Those two lines are a sample of the way in which the reproof is to be uttered, of the spirit of reproof. The aim is the reproof to the sleeper, the dead."² According to this view, this is the same as those that are in darkness, those that are without Christ. The light in this verse is the light of Christ. This is taken from the last clause when it says, "Christ shall shine upon thee." This is the light of the gospel. However, telling him to arise does not imply conversion. It only emphasizes his death and in Ephesians 2:1 the believer, through the light of the gospel, is to give the call of grace, which has the power by Christ, to raise

¹R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of Galatians, Ephesians and Philippians (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1946), pp. 609-10.

²Ibid., p. 611.

them out of sleep, and death and darkness. But this is not the emphasis of the text according to this view. The emphasis is placed on the believer and the work of reproof. The result of this reproof is not given. Though this view does admit, through verse 14 that the light, the gospel, has the power to transform. It does have all the power of an efficacious call, but it is just not the emphasis of this passage, according to this view.

This is an acceptable view of this passage. It solves the problem of light by assigning it to the job of reproofing the works of darkness. But the writer does not hold this view.

The Light Transforms Interpretation

This view, as does the other views, takes the verses immediately before verses 12-13 as having the Christian's responsibility to the works of darkness as the main meaning. To the believer that duty is twofold. The first duty is to have no fellowship with them. And the second duty is to reprove them. The former duty is expressed in $\mu\eta$ $\sigma\upsilon\gamma\kappa\omicron\iota\nu\omega\nu\epsilon\acute{\iota}\tau\epsilon$ (vs. 11), "have no fellowship with them." Fellowship is something you have with people or things with which you have a common denominator, who are congenial; who have the same views, feelings and interests; and those who delight in each other's society. It is in this sense that the believer has fellowship with God and with Christ, and therefore with each other. Fellowship is to delight and to partake of things in common. So therefore, the

believer, who is light in the Lord, cannot have fellowship with the works of darkness. It is not something he can take part in or delight.

The second responsibility of the Christian to the works of darkness is to reprove them. This is given in the last clause of verse 11. However, it is at this point that this view differs from the other views. ἑλέγχετε, "reprove" is not understood in the sense of expose, or rebuking. This view takes reprove in the sense of convincing by evidence. The emphasis is placed on the effects of illumination by which the true nature of anything is revealed.¹

Light is used in this passage to refer to the light of the word of the Gospel. When this light is shed upon the unbeliever's sins, it reveals his true character, and by doing this produces the consequent consciousness of guilt and pollution. One Scripture that is used to point this out is 1 Corinthians 14:24, "the secrets of the heart are revealed."

By this method they are corrected; as is more fully taught in the following verses. The ethics as well as the theology of the Bible are founded on the principles that knowledge and holiness, ignorance and sin, are inseparable. If you import knowledge you secure holiness; and if you render ignorant you deprave. This of course is not true of secular knowledge--i.e. of the knowledge of other than religious subjects; nor is it true of mere speculative knowledge of religious truth. It is true only of that knowledge the Scriptures call spiritual discernment. Of that knowledge, however, intellectual cognition is an essential element. And so far as human agency in the production of the

¹Hodge, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians, p. 292.

conviction of sin is concerned, it is limited to holding forth the word of life, or letting the light of divine truth shine into the darkened minds of men, and upon their evil deeds.¹

This view takes the things that are done in darkness in verse 12, to refer to sins that are done in secret. This is in contrast to the other views, which hold that the things that are done in darkness are sins in general that are done in darkness because they come from ignorance of God. That is, they are done because men are ignorant of God and His ways. The second understanding is that these sins, the works of darkness, are actually done in the dark. They are done out of sight, away from the light of day, and the light of the Word of God. They actually shun the light, of any source. This is the very reason that these sins should be reprov'd, that they might be changed. In order for this to happen they must be brought under the influence of the light of the Gospel.

Accordingly, verses 13-14 are further illustrations that the light of the Gospel exercises transforming power. Verse 13 is given to enforce the command that is given in verses 11-12, that is to reprove the works that are done in darkness. For though they are done in secret and are too shameful to mention, yet they are not beyond hope. For the truth of God is efficacious. They can be corrected by the light of the divine truth in the Word of the gospel.

¹ Ibid., p. 293.

Westcott states that "the darkness flies before the light."¹

All things being reprov'd (vs. 13) refers back to verse 12 to the things that are done in secret. This refers to the works of darkness. These are the things that are reprov'd and are made manifest. The words "by the light" are not to be connected with "being reprov'd." But they are to be connected with φανερούται, which will give the sense that they are made manifest by the light. In the first clause of verse 14, being manifest is passive, and not middle with an active sense. This would make the meaning "whatever is manifested"; not "whatever makes manifest." This view takes φανερούμενον as passive. Therefore, the apostle is not speaking of the nature of spiritual light, but of its effects. Therefore, the meaning that it illuminates or turns into light all it touches, or whatever it penetrates. The believer, then, is to reprove. For in so doing he will transform those who are darkness into light. It is the Christian's duty to bring the light of the Gospel of Christ to bear upon their ignorance, darkness, and the works of darkness, that the soul might be changed into light in the Lord.²

Verse 14 is used further to prove this interpretation. They take verse 14 as a call to the sleeping which

¹Brooke F. Westcott, Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians (London: MacMillan & Co., 1906), p. 79.

²Hodge, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians, pp. 293-94.

is a figure for those that are dead in sin, to arise and meet the light-given beam. These people are addressed as asleep and dead in darkness of sin and therefore are involved in spiritual darkness. The light which comes from Christ has the power to reach even the dead and bring them to life both physically and spiritually. John 5:25 is used as a proof-text for this idea: "The hour is coming, and now is, that the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God and they that hear shall live" (ASV).

This does not mean that the dead must be revived before they hear the voice of the Son of God. But his voice causes them to hear and live. So the passage before us means that those asleep must arise from the dead and come to Christ for light, but that the light which Christ sheds around them, has power to awake the sleeping dead. Thus, the passage is a confirmation of what is said in the preceding verse, viz., that everything made manifest by the light, is light.¹

This view, therefore, places the emphasis of this passage on the effect of the light on those that are working darkness. Darkness is taken to be ignorance of God and those dead in sins that are done because of ignorance. The light is taken to be the Gospel that those who are light in the Lord bear in their testimony and conduct. This light, as it shines on those who are in darkness, transforms them into light. John 3:20 is used as another proof-text for this. The emphasis is placed on the statement that he that does the truth comes to the light.

The power of the Gospel with the work of the Holy Spirit, does transform people. The book of Acts (ch. 3-4;

¹ Ibid., p. 298.

8:12; 10:44-48), which tells of the spread of the Gospel, points this out. The command of the Lord to preach the Word of the Gospel could lead one to this conclusion. However, the presentation of the Gospel, as light, does not always exercise this transforming influence in the lives of those who are doing works of darkness and are in darkness.

The first objection that is given to this interpretation is that the light does not always exercise this transforming power upon those that are exposed to it. Bruce, in his commentary on Ephesians, points out that while the Lord was here ministering he shed light upon the Pharisees, the religious leaders in Israel during his day. This illumination did not have the transforming influence. But rather it had the opposite effect. "The presence of the Light of the world stripped the blind leaders of the blind in Judaea of their cloaks of darkness; but it did not of necessity recast their moral horizon."¹ It made them hate Jesus more. The Pharisees resented the exposure of their "darkness" so much so that they were more determined to do away with Christ, the light, which had exposed them.

Another illustration which may be given in opposition to this view is that of Balaam from the Old Testament. There were few people in the Old Testament who had more light than this man. He was a prophet. He had communion with God. He had to some degree, spoken true prophecies. Nevertheless, his heart was not right with God. He had a

¹Bruce, Ephesians and Colossians, p. 123.

heart of covetousness. 2 Peter 2:15 says that he loved the wages of unrighteousness. According to the biblical account, he perished in his sins (Josh 13:22).

Another illustration is that of Judas. No one could have been exposed to more light than this man. He was a disciple of the Lord. He was one of the twelve that the Lord chose to be with Him. He heard the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, both in public and in private. Judas even performed miracles with the other disciples. If he had not done so, the other apostles would have been suspect of him. But, to the very end, no one but the Lord was aware of his subterfuge. Even before he betrayed the Lord for thirty pieces of silver, the disciples were not aware of his character. But of this man, Christ said that it were better if he had not been born (Luke 22:22). He was lost forever, even though he was exposed to so much light. He was never transformed so as to become light in the Lord himself.

Eadie, in his commentary, points out that all the wicked, and even the Devil himself, are reprov'd by the light. But this does not mean transformation. Therefore, this view is rejected in favor of the expose theory.¹

¹John Eadie, Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1965), pp. 386-87.

Summary

The interpretations that have been given in chapter four are all biblical interpretations. That is, there are no views that represent something that is not true to the teachings of Scripture.

Each of the six views presented agree on the use of the word darkness in Ephesians 5:8-14. They agree that darkness is used metaphorically to refer to sin and sinners. Each interpretation agrees on the use of light in verses 8 and 13. The former verse uses light as a reference to refer to those that are believers. And the latter verse uses light to refer to the message of the gospel.

Each view agrees that the believer has a responsibility as a believer, to the works of darkness and those who are in darkness. That responsibility is to reprove and expose the works of darkness.

The major point of difference is to what extent the light reproves the works of darkness. Does it bring them, those who are in darkness, to a transformation? Do they become believers? Are they changed from light to darkness? Two views answer this question negatively. They are the expose interpretation and the reprove the works of darkness interpretation. The double exposure and the light transforms interpretation would answer this same question positively.

Each author who holds a particular view argues convincingly for his interpretation. In the next chapter the

writer will present his interpretation of Ephesians 5:8-14. The reasons for the writer's interpretation are in some cases the same as the reasons for the interpretations in the views presented in chapter 4. Some of the reasons are different than those that are presented in chapter 4.

CHAPTER V

THE WRITER'S VIEW

The writer's view of Ephesians 5:8-14 is that light and darkness are used to refer to believers and unbelievers. Darkness speaks of the unbeliever's state and manner of life. Light is used to illustrate the believer's state and responsibility. The Gospel, as a source of light, exercises transforming influence over darkness in the life of the unbeliever.

Concerning Darkness

First, the writer believes that the word σκότος, "darkness" is used metaphorically in the moral and spiritual sense. In 5:8, it is used as an abstract for the concrete. Darkness describes the condition of the believers in Ephesus before they became believers. This is understood from the verb ἦτε, of which σκότος, "darkness" is the direct object.¹

In 5:11 σκότους is used as a genitive of possession. Here darkness is used symbolically of the moral and spiritual conduct of people who are unbelievers. In this verse their conduct is described as being ἔργοις . . .

¹Thayer, Lexicon, p. 581.

ἀκάρποις, "unfruitful works." The believer is not only in a state of darkness, but does works of darkness.¹

In verse 12, τὰ γὰρ κρυφῆ γινόμενα ὑπ αὐτῶν, "For the things being done by them in secret," has darkness as its antecedent. Grammatically, this would go back to 5:11, which is the closest reference. The writer believes that this clause is talking about deeds of darkness. The peculiar characteristic is that they are not as visible as other forms of darkness. This could refer to sins that are done out of view of most people, like fornication, stealing, murder, and other forms of immorality. In contrast, bad language, drunkenness, and hatefulness, would be more in the public's view.²

The writer understands τὰ δὲ πάντα ἐλεγχόμενα, "but all those things being reprov'd," as referring to darkness in general. The reason for this understanding is that the apostle is telling the believers to reprove darkness. This would include darkness as spoken of in verses 8-13, whether spoken of directly or indirectly as it is in verses 12 and 13. The pronouns τὰ and πάντα, "all these," would seem to support this understanding.³

Darkness was still very much a part of the city of Ephesus when Paul wrote this letter. There were many

¹ Ibid.

² Eadie, Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians, p. 383.

³ Hendriksen, Exposition of Ephesians, p. 234.

people who were unbelievers. They needed the light of the Gospel, which is the next consideration.

Concerning Light

The writer believes that φῶς, "light," is used metaphorically throughout 5:8-14 in four ways. First, in verse 8 it is used to describe the believer's state. Secondly, light is used to show the character of his life (vs. 9). Thirdly, light is used to show the believer his responsibility in relation to the darkness around him (vs. 13). And finally, light is used to show the possible results of the exercise of his responsibility as light to the darkness (vs. 14).

The Believer's State (vs. 8)

νῦν δὲ φῶς ἐν κυρίῳ, "but now (ye are) light in the Lord" (vs. 8) refers to the believers at Ephesus. They had undergone a change from darkness to light. Now they were the children of God. The term κυρίῳ, "Lord," gives the relationship that they have to Christ because of their new position. They are no more under the domination of darkness. Now, as children of light, they are under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.¹

The Believer's Responsibility (vss. 8-14)

The believer's first responsibility is in his conduct to ὡς τέκνα φῶς περιπατεῖτε, "walk as a child of

¹Thayer, Lexicon, p. 663.

light (vs. 8). And he is to see that his character of life produces the fruits of light (vs. 9). This responsibility is given in the form of an imperative in the last clause of verse 8, περιπατεῖτε, "walk." It is in the present tense, which means this command is a constant obligation. This is the child of light's first responsibility.¹

The believer's second responsibility is given in terms of his relationship to darkness as a child of light (vss. 11-13). The first clause of verse 11 gives the negative command, μὴ συγκοινωνεῖτε, "have no fellowship." Just as in the natural world, light and darkness do not mix, so in the spiritual world, they should not mix. The believer should not have close relationships with unbelievers. The child of light should not take part in the sins of darkness.² The second clause of verse 11 gives the positive side of the believer's responsibility, μᾶλλον δὲ καὶ ἐλέγχετε, "but rather reprove them." Simply put, the believer is to point out to the unbeliever that his deeds of darkness are sins. The believer should show the unbeliever that the works that he does are not according to God's standards. The light (vs. 13) is to be the believer's means of accomplishing this reproof. Light in verse 13 refers to the message of the Gospel. This is the only thing that will bring the kind of reproof of darkness that is scripturally acceptable. The believer should do this by the contrast of his life, which

¹Wuest, Ephesians and Colossians in the Greek New Testament, p. 123.

should be a life of light. He should do it by words and deeds.¹

Finally, verse 14 gives the possible results of the believer doing his responsibility, πᾶν γὰρ το φανερούμενον φῶς ἐστίν, "For all things having been made manifest, is light." Light is being used here to describe a state of being. Light describes the possibility of those that are in darkness becoming light. That is, they could be saved when presented the "light" of the Gospel.

The first reason for believing this is that light is used here as it was in verse 8. In verse 8 it described what the Ephesians had become. In verse 14 it is describing what the unbeliever can become.²

Another reason for this view is the verb ἐστίν, "is." This is a "to be" verb. And it is being used here to describe a state of being.³

Third, one must consider the context. Paul has told them that one of the believer's responsibilities as light in the Lord is to reprove the works of darkness. In verse 13 he continues this exhortation and gives the two possible results of this reproof. The first result of the reproof of the believer to the unbeliever and his works is exposure: τὰ δὲ πάντα ἐλεγχόμενα ὑπὸ τοῦ φωτὸς φανεροῦται (vs. 13).

¹H. C. G. Moule, Ephesian Studies (Great Britain: Fleming H. Revell Co., n.d.), p. 260.

²Abbott, Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians and Colossians, p. 152.

³Moule, Ephesian Studies, p. 260.

"But all those things being reprov'd are by the light made manifest."¹ τὰ πάντα, "those things," refer to the works of darkness.² This would include the things that are done in secret also, since they are works of darkness. The only difference is that those things done in secret are less public than some works of darkness. It is a question, with which of the terms ὑπο τοῦ φωτός, "by the light," be associated? It seems more natural to join them with φανεροῦται, "made manifest," than ελεγχόμενα, "being reprov'd." The reason is that φῶς agrees more naturally with φανεροῦται because light is the agent that reveals.³ Light in this case is used figuratively for the message of the Gospel in the life of the believer whether by word or deed.⁴ The Gospel is the source of light. It is truth and righteousness which is the opposite of works of darkness and sins that are done in secret. When these sins are reprov'd, they are exposed, manifested, unveiled for the evil they are in the sight of God. It allows the unbeliever to know that he and his deeds are not right in the sight of God. This lays the groundwork for the statement that is made in the first clause of verse 14: πᾶν γὰρ το φανερούμενον φῶς ἐστίν, "for all things made manifest is light." As has been stated concerning

¹Hendriksen, Exposition of Ephesians, pp. 232-33.

²Lenski, Galatians and Ephesians, p. 609.

³Eadie, Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians, p. 384.

⁴Moule, Ephesian Studies, p. 260.

the previous clause (vs. 13), light, as in the Christian message, is the source of manifestation of the darkness. However, in this clause the writer believes that the apostle is talking about the transforming power of the light of the Gospel. The light of the Gospel has power, by the work of the Spirit of God, to transform those in darkness who hear it into light. Thus, if they hear with faith and receive the message of light into their hearts, they can be transformed into children of light. They can become believers. Also, there is the consideration of his purpose in writing and the situation of the church at Ephesus.

Paul's Purpose in Writing

Paul's manner of life after he became light in the Lord was one of letting men and women know that they were in a state of darkness in the sight of God. This was done by the Gospel message which is the light that exposes the darkness in the lives of men.

The last command that was given by the Lord Jesus before He ascended into heaven, was for the disciples to preach the Gospel to all the world (Matt 28:19-20). It was the Lord Himself who said that the world was in darkness and He had come to bring light (John 3:19-21; 8:12). The Apostle Paul was chosen specifically by the Lord Jesus to bear the Gospel message to the world of the Gentiles. Paul says in his testimony before King Agrippa that God had chosen him to bear light in darkness.

But rise, and stand upon thy feet, for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou has seen, and of those things in which I will appear unto thee. Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me (Acts 26:16-18).

The Gospel message, here stated as light, is the power of God for turning men from darkness, sin, and the power of Satan to God. It seems possible, from the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul that light in the first clause of 5:14 refers to the transforming power of the Gospel.

Historical Background

Fourth, from the historical background of the Apostle's preaching at Ephesus, it would be reasonable to somewhat assume that transformation is his meaning in this passage. Acts 18-20 gives the background historically of Paul's ministry at Ephesus. He came there on his third missionary journey. We might assume that he came because he saw the tremendous need of the city, which was steeped in darkness, for the light of the Gospel message.¹ The city of Ephesus was in great darkness because of its social and religious background. It being the center of false religious worship was probably the source of its greatest darkness. For the first commandment is that you should not have any other god before God (Exod 20:1-3).

¹Pfeiffer and Vos, Wycliffe Historical Geography of Bible Lands, pp. 359-60.

This is probably Satan's greatest feat of darkness, the height of sin in getting men to worship other than the true God. It was to this center of great moral and spiritual darkness that Paul had brought the light of the Gospel. It was the only light that could dispel the darkness and bring men into the light. His purpose in presenting the Gospel message certainly was not only to make manifest the sins of the people, but to make believers. As he said in the Thessalonian epistles (1 Thess 1:9), the people had turned from idols to the living God through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This was his purpose at Ephesus. Even though the church was established and had been taught substantially by Paul, there were still many people caught in the darkness. Since Paul was no longer there, it was the church's responsibility to hold forth the light. They are to hold forth the light with the purpose of exposing and transforming those who were in darkness.

Finally, verse 14 of this chapter tells how the transformation takes place. It is the conclusion of this section of Scripture. It is a description of the unbeliever's former condition outside Christ. It was one of sleep, death and darkness. However, if the dead were to respond to the message of light they could be converted. They could be changed from darkness to light, from sleep to awakeness by the power of Christ. Though there were many who had come to the light at Ephesus, there were still more that had not come out of the darkness into the light of Christ. Though

it is possible to believe that the Apostle is speaking only of the exposure of evil, it is very reasonable to understand the passage from the standpoint of the possible transforming power of the Gospel.¹

Summary

Darkness, according to the writer's understanding, is used in Ephesians 5:8-14 to refer to the unbeliever. Darkness refers to his state of being unsaved. This term also refers to his conduct. His conduct is involved in works of darkness. These are sins that are against God's standard of life given in the Scriptures.

Light in Ephesians 5:8-14 is used to refer to the believer's state, his conduct and his responsibility. His state is that of being saved, which is described in verse 8 as "light in the Lord." His conduct is to be that of a child of light (vs. 8). The believer's responsibility to the darkness around him is that of reproof. He is not to take part in darkness, sin, but is to be actively opposed to it. The believer's means of reproofing the darkness is the light of the Gospel. It is the light of the Gospel in his deeds and words.

The believer is to expect results from the exercise of his responsibility as light. He should expect the Gospel to be a transforming influence in the life of those that are living in darkness.

¹Hodge, A Commentary of the Epistle to the Ephesians, p. 298.

CONCLUSION

The Bible is the word of the living God. It was given as light in the sense of revelation to make man wise unto salvation (2 Tim 3:15). Man is in a state of darkness. Darkness, as it is used in the Bible, refers to ignorance of sin. This ignorance is of the true knowledge of God. Darkness is both a state of being in man and around him. There is only one way for this darkness to be eliminated. That is through the light of the Word of God and the light that is in the life of the believer. It is to this problem of darkness that light, as discussed in this paper, is addressed.

In the foregoing paper, an attempt has been made to establish something of the background, context and problems in connection with light in Ephesians 5:8-14. The study has yielded several important points.

First, light is an important word in biblical usage. It is important in the spiritual and natural realm. Its greatest importance is spiritual. It is used to refer to God, Christ and the believer. The believer became light in the sense of being a child of God through the power of the Gospel as light. Having become light in the Lord, he has a responsibility to the light that has been entrusted to him.

Does the light expose or reprove only? Or does it transform also? These are questions that are dealt with in the different interpretations. The fact that there are different views on the meaning and the extent of the work of light shows that the passage is not absolutely clear. The largest questions are with regard to the transforming power of the light of the Gospel in this passage.

However, it seems reasonable to understand that the light of the Gospel has transforming power. But it must be kept in mind that Paul is not giving a treatise on the process of salvation. He is telling those who have become light in the Lord their responsibility as children of light, and what they should expect the light to do in the lives of others. They can expect it to do what it did to them. They can become light. The historical background and the context with the grammatical considerations would bear out this meaning. Yes, the light exposes darkness in the lives of unbelievers and believers. And yes, it can transform the unbeliever and make him a child of God. This seems to be the meaning that the writer of Ephesians 5:8-14 was trying to convey to his readers then and now.

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