

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Website: www.churchredeemeraz.org

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Pastor/Teacher
Gary L. W. Johnson

A CHANGE OF MIND

“Repentance,” wrote J.C. Ryle, “is a thorough change of man’s natural heart upon the subject of sin. We are all born in sin. We naturally love sin. We take to sin as soon as we can act and think, as the bird takes to flying and the fish takes to swimming. There never was a child that required schooling or education in order to learn deceitfulness, sensuality, passion, self-will, gluttony, pride, and foolishness. These things are not picked up from bad companions, or gradually learned by a long course of tedious instruction. They spring up of themselves, even when boys and girls are brought up alone. The seeds of them are evidently the natural product of the heart. The aptitude of all children to these things is an unanswerable proof of the corruption and fall of man. Now when this heart of ours is changed by the Holy Ghost, when this natural love of sin is cast out, then takes place that change which the Word of God calls *repentance*. The man in whom the change is wrought is said to *repent*. He may be called, in one word, a *penitent* man.”¹ Paul has declared the believer’s great position in Christ with all the privileges that go with it in chapters 1-3. This pattern is likewise followed in Romans where chapters 1-11 lay out Paul’s doctrinal concerns and chapters 12-16 contain his practical admonitions that flow out of his doctrinal convictions. The remaining three chapters of Ephesians constitute his exhortations to conform to what you are. His language is strong; he repeatedly uses the imperative mode to drive his admonitions and prohibitions home. His key word in this section is “walk”; believers are to “walk worthy of their calling” (4:1); they must not “walk like the Gentiles” (4:17); they must “walk in love” (5:2). He now directs their attention to “walking in the light” (5:8). What does he mean? What is “the light”?

I. THE CONTRAST: BEFORE AND AFTER (vv. 8, 9)

The Apostle Paul frequently uses this method in his epistles. Chapter 2 represents a good example. He never tired of pointing out the great transition from the old to the new, from death to life, from darkness to light (comp. I Thess. 5:4ff).

A. **The Past:** You were once darkness. The verb “were” (ETE, imperfect. Stressing continual past action) is in the emphatic position in the Greek text. Darkness refers to their once total sphere of living. Darkness controlled their behavior. All that they did was conducted in darkness. Not only IN darkness, they WERE darkness. The word darkness, SKOTOS, refers to moral and mental blackness (comp. 4:18). It is a word that is synonymous with ignorance (cf. II Cor. 4:3-6).

B. **The Present:** But now, one of Paul’s favorite phrases (cf. Rom. 3:21), you are light in the Lord. NOTICE: The light did not originate in them. Believers do not possess light in themselves, it is from outside of themselves (comp. Jn. 8:12; 1 Jn. 3:1).

C. **The Imperative:** Live as children of light. The word translated live in the NIV is PERIPATEITE, used in the imperative mood, lit. walk. While speaking of their position

and privilege, the Apostle has called them light itself: Now that he comes to speak of their conduct, he returns to this metaphor of 'walking.'"²

D. **The Results:** For the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth. Light produces certain characteristics. It will naturally do so; it need not be forced (cf. Gal. 5:22). *GOODNESS* – has reference to personal character; *RIGHTEOUSNESS* – in relationship to our social dealings; *TRUTH* – the ruling principle of all conduct, stressing obligation in all facets of life.

II. THE ATTITUDE: DISCERNMENT (vv. 10-12)

As darkness parallels ignorance, so light corresponds to "understanding." All believers, regardless of I.Q., have had "the eyes of their understanding enlightened" (1:18). They have "an anointing" from God (I John 2:27) so as to be able to receive spiritual truth. The natural man has no such ability (I Cor. 2:14). This does not mean that somehow apart from our own endeavors to study the word of God (cf. I Tim. 4:13-16) we will grow in our understanding of spiritual truth. It will never happen.

A. **The Expectation:** "Find out what pleases the Lord." The word translated "find out" is *DOKIMAZO*, to approve after examination, to arrange and execute a test, to carry out a careful examination, to discover through personal experience and effort. This involves our minds and our wills. Discovering the will of God is no accident. Our understanding is involved (comp. 5:17). But it is also a moral issue involving our wills. "What pleases the Lord," *EUARESTOS*, well-pleasing, acceptable (cf. Rom. 14:18; II Cor. 5:9).

B. **The Separation:** "Have nothing to do" is the word *SUNGKOINONEITE*, a present imperative, literally no fellowship, partnership, close association, "with the fruitless deeds of darkness," comp. Gal. 5:19ff and Rom. 2:7.

C. **The Exposure:** "But rather expose them," *ELEGCHETE*, present imperative, literally to convict or convince, to reprove, correct. Same word used of the Holy Spirit in John 16:8-11, testing issues in the approval of the good and in the exposure of the evil. The believer must not only avoid evil, he must also expose it.

D. **The Reason:** "For it is shameful," *AISCHRON*, literally disgrace (cf. I Cor. 11:6) "even to mention what the disobedient do in secret." It is the property of light to dispel darkness. The exposure is accomplished more by our lives (v. 9) than by our words.

III. THE PROCESS: MANIFESTATION AND DEMONSTRATION (vv. 13-14)

"A man who receives the light of Christ reflects it. He cannot receive it except so far as he has affinity with it, and he cannot receive it without reflecting it. The light itself a purifying force. When it acts, it brings out all that is able to sustain its presence."³ What effect does the light have?

A. **Manifestation:** It shows the true nature of sin. The light reveals the obscure and hidden. When "exposed," *PHANEROO*, literally to make clear, to make known, to become visible, revealed.

B. **Demonstration:** The light declares the sons of God. Light transforms. Paul makes reference to Isa. 26:19 and 60:1 to illustrate the power of the light. Some have used this text to teach that the natural man has the ability (free will) to respond to the Gospel. This ignores the context. Paul is declaring the power of the light (v. 14a). He is NOT stressing the power of the dead, who have no power.

CONCLUSION: Paul confronted people with the truth...and with its implications. To begin with, obedience to God's will involves sharp separation from the world. The world is in darkness as Calvin declared, "Again, in this world there is nothing but pitch darkness, and even so thick that we do not know how to step one pace without tumbling or without straying out of our way. Therefore, it is necessary for us to be guided, and that our Lord Jesus Christ shows us the way. This is what St. Paul shows us here, and how our Lord Jesus enlightens us. It is not only that we are dim-sighted, and that he helps us and supplies the lack that is in us, but also that we are stark blind, yes and dead; in short, we are in the pit of hell. When a

corpse is laid in the grave, men may bring candles and torches to it, but it never sees the more for all that. So then, our Lord Jesus imparts his light to us, not to make us see more clearly than we did before, but to give us our whole eyesight again, seeing that we are stark blind. Now then, seeing that Jesus Christ speaks in this way and continues day by day to waken us and make us see more clearly, ought we not to follow his example and restrain our neighbours as much as we can when we see them straying to their destruction?"⁴

ENDNOTES

¹ J.C. Ryle, *Old Paths* (rpt. James Clark, 1972), p. 405.

² J.A. Robinson, *Commentary on Ephesians: Exposition of the Greek Text* (rpt. Kregel, 1979), p. 120.

³ B.F. Westcott, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (Macmillan, 1906), p. 271.

⁴ J. Calvin, *Sermons On the Epistle to the Ephesians* (rpt. Banner of Truth, 73), 533.