

Putting Off The Old, Putting On The New

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Date: 14 June 2026

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[0:00] This is a sermon from King's Church West Lothian. Let me read that for you.

It says, Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath will come on those who are disobedient.

Therefore do not be partners with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light, for the fruit of light consists of all goodness, righteousness and truth. And find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. And then later it says, verse 15, Be careful then how you live, not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine which leads to debauchery. Instead be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit.

[1:55] Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord. Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. I wonder, anyone know what time it is in America just now?

I suspect, given the World Cup going on, some of you might have a bit more of an idea. I know there's quite a few time zones, but anyone got any idea what kind of time it is? I don't know. Were you out watching the football by any chance last night?

Yes, you were. Okay. Anyone? I'm not going to do a show of hands who is up, because they'll be nodding off in about five minutes, so I'll know quite clearly. Some of you will be more aware than others as to what time it is.

It's about five minutes of the time of New York. Yeah, great. Something like that? Okay, I've lost track because I'm nervous because I'm preaching, but something like that maybe? I mean, I can tell you. It's 9.40 in Lexus.

There you go. Very good. Was that Google, or did you just know that? No, I know. Okay, right. Great. Well, I mean, if you're in New York just now, you might be gathering for your Sunday morning worship.

[2:58] There are other time zones around the world, obviously, because time zones kind of matter. You've got Nairobi. People will be having a late afternoon meal, potentially. In Tokyo just now, people will be preparing for bed. Now, I'm saying that because I think time zones is quite a helpful analogy to help us understand what's going on in the Scriptures, because Paul is really keen, and God is really keen that we understand where we are.

And that's kind of been the theme of Ephesians, right? That we are in Christ, and then we saw kind of what that meant, being chosen, adopted, redeemed, sealed with the Spirit, made one, a new person, all of those good things.

And then we've been looking a bit at, so what for our living? And then we get to this bit here in Ephesians 5.3, where Paul is like, there must not be a hint of this and of this.

And in a moment, we're going to come back to this idea of time zones, but I think it's quite helpful for us to think about where he has put us and what that means for us. I once did Camp America many years ago.

Now I realize, I was like, oh man, that was 20 years ago. Time flies. But I did Camp America, and a good friend of mine called Dan, he, not this Dan, but another Dan, he just looked really ill in the first kind of couple of weeks.

[4:09] And by the third week of our Camp America time, I think a few of us started to worry if he kind of had some medical condition or something, because he was going pale, and he had no energy, and he was just down all the time, and he just was disconnected from everyone around

him.

And we're like, what's going on with Dan? And eventually I asked him, he said, I'm fine, I'm fine. He said, you're always checking your watch. What is, like, are you taking something?

And he said, no, that's so I know what the real time is. The real time? Well, the real time is, you know, we're in New Jersey, so I can't remember how many hours ahead that is, but I was like, well, the real time, because we're here, is this time.

He was like, no, no, the real time. I mean, back in the UK, where my family and my friends are. And he was living in two time zones, so he had decided to try and be present running kids' camps for loads of screaming kids, even louder than these guys.

And yet what he was doing in his head was he was living in UK time. So when we were all sort of winding down for the day, his family were kind of in the middle of the day, so he was calling home at some crazy o'clock to catch them.

[5:11] And in his head, he wasn't in the time zone he'd been put in physically. And of course, that just meant he wasn't sleeping properly, because he was making these crazy o'clock calls. And he just wasn't there, and he wasn't able to be where he'd been chosen to be, amongst loads of kids and all this kind of worship stuff and all kinds of cool things, because he hadn't really transitioned into the right time zone.

It was really, really bad news for him. And it did make him quite ill. He then changed his kind of thinking a bit on it, changed his watch, and started to actually show up and had a really great time. And by the end of the summer, we were having a cracking summer together, a load of good friends together, serving God, serving young people. And where we've been put really matters.

And I think you can see that here when you read these opening verses, when Paul is really straight on a few things. He says, Among you there mustn't be a hint of sexual immorality, impurity, greed. These are improper. No foolish talk, coarse joking. These are out of place. And then when you come down here, you realise the why. It's not that he's forgotten the grace of God, because we've learnt from this point earlier in Ephesians and throughout Scripture that we're not saved because of what we've done or because of who we are, but because of who he is.

[6:35] We're not saved because we've worked really hard to be good. We're saved and we're loved because God is really, really good. But the Bible is really keen that, and in this particular book, Paul is really, really keen, that we get that some things, when we do them, are like living in the wrong time zone.

They're like living in the dark when we now live in the light. And you see that in verse 8. I think this is the key verse in the passage we're going to major on today. Verse 8. For you were once darkness, and now you are light in the Lord.

Live as children of light. Just read that one more time. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

Live as children of light. Because the good news of the gospel is that we're now in Christ. That now, rather than us saving ourselves, Jesus did that for us.

Rather than our sin being the thing that is seen, it's Jesus' righteousness that our Heavenly Father sees. We're in him. It says, you were once darkness, because all of us at one point were lost and wandering.

[7:50] We're blind spiritually. We're unsure of the way forward. We're unable to see God for who he really is. And yet Jesus has opened our eyes and enlightened our hearts.

There's all these different analogies used for what he's done as he puts us in Christ. The ESV doesn't say live as children of light.

It says, walk as children of light. And apparently the translators were a bit contested over this, because the Greek, I understand, is more walk. But the NIV guys, they thought that seemed a bit odd.

Like we might physically think that they're just talking about, make sure you follow the light everywhere you go, you know. So they chose to translate it as live. Because the scripture here is talking about in everyday life, as you put one foot in front of the other, make sure we keep living as children of light, rather than the old time zone or the old location.

This might remind you, if you know Colossians, this might remind you of a really great verse in Colossians that says this. It's Colossians 1 verse 13.

[9:00] It says, For he, Jesus, has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

At the time that this book of the Bible was written, there was a place called the Artemis Temple. Now, I could, I've forgotten to note it down, but this thing was absolutely, oh, I've forgotten to turn over, you can't see my slides.

This temple was absolutely massive. And apparently looked a bit like this. Quite an impressive, quite an impressive place. And it had basically become a sort of central place nearby the Ephesian church.

It had become a bit of a bank. So much money was kind of flowing through the place that they started having their own banking system going on. It had been a place that you went for entertainment. It had become a place of greed, where you could go and consume loads of different things and fulfil loads of different wants you might have.

It was a place where people would go and show off how wonderful they were in giving speeches. And it was a place that you might go to show off how, kind of like Evil Comedy Club is what I'm thinking.

[10:20] You'd go to show you had the rhetorical skills. You were better than everyone else. And you would go and show that everyone else was kind of lesser than you. You were above them. It was also a place of sexual immorality.

It was a place of prostitution, where people would sell their bodies and where people could go and get any of their kind of wants met. And it was a place, essentially, of porn.

It was a place filled with the kind of biblical time equivalent of porn. Basically, loads of graphical images. So people would go there on purpose because they would want those kind of wants met. It might seem kind of funny, like stone carvings being something people would travel for. And it might seem distant from us, but actually not that different in reality.

You know, people now don't need to travel hundreds of miles or even 10 miles or two miles to see whatever they want to because most of us have a phone in our pocket that can basically meet any want, however good, however bad, many wants anyway, that you might have.

[11:31] We know that something crazy, like one in three Google searches, one in three requests on the internet is supposed to be for porn these days. We know that young people are exposed to more and more graphic images as it becomes more normal for everything and anything, you know, from the attempted beheading last week that was making rounds on the internet to all kinds of other stuff.

But this place might sound different, but do we deal with greed either in us or around us? Yeah. Do we deal with lust in us and around us?

Quite probably. Do we deal with the temptation to be able to have anything we want at the touch of a button? You know, I don't think God is against the occasional delivery or even a regular one, but I think once our kind of needs are constantly being met in our own strength, I think that's why Paul is saying, hang on a second, make sure you're a dependent people.

Make sure you know who he is and who he's made you and be careful not to go back to the old ways you had of you being the answer to everything and you may have to get your needs met in any way.

Paul says, you were once in darkness. You were once darkness. Now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.

[12:59] Now, I'm going old school here. I'm much happier with technology than flip charts, but I thought this might be helpful for you. So let's see if I can master the flip chart today. So it got me thinking, what is going on?

Because Paul identifies, right there in verse one and two, Paul identifies three things. Greed, sexual immorality, the Greek word coincidentally is porneia, and foolish or coarse talk, which is kind of lording over other people, showing how great you are.

And it got me thinking, what is it that these things kind of promise? And these are just my thoughts, but what is it these things kind of promise? And I reckon there are a few things that they promise.

One is they promise control. Because if you can get endless access, if you're going to this temple and you can kind of just get whatever you want, well, you get it. It's up to you what you have.

There's abundance there. There's anything you could possibly want. They might also offer you power. Because actually, if you're willing to pay for it at this temple, and similarly for us these days,

if you're willing to pay, whether that's morally or financially, you have many things that you can get. [14:08] There is almost no limit these days to what you can order or access. But also, they offer a kind of security. Because there's something of, you know, I don't have to be dependent on kind of getting, kind of working hard to get something.

I can just get it in this place that offers it. I can just get some, you know, someone around the world to do this for me. And I'll just get it delivered to me. Or I don't have to be in a marriage relationship. I can just watch that stuff.

I can just keep swiping. And I can see people do anything I want them to. Or I don't have to be kind to other people. I get to be the one who feels good, or looks good, or is above other people.

So, while they're slightly odd three in some ways, they seem to offer us control, power, security.

And they're all about needs, right? They're all like, actually, like, actually, God created sex.

Like, he's not anti-sex. He is anti-sexual immorality. He created things for us to have abundant provision. Like, he created in the garden and said, you know, not only go forth and multiply, but this is for you, essentially.

[15:19] He gives us these wonderful things available to us. And he's a God that loves the word. He loves words. The word became flesh. He's a God who chooses to pass on truth to us in words, who spoke to people, said, come alive, and they came alive.

Also chooses humility. Now, in contrast, you and I, we've seen through the book of Ephesians, the truth for us is actually not that anything external, even in ourselves, can really give us these things, can really give us control or power, security or need, but in fact, that we are made to be in relationship with him.

That we are, in fact, a people designed to be led by him. By him. That we are a people designed to be empowered by the spirit, not to grab hold of power by buying it or by watching it or by kind of paying people for stuff, but he's the one who gives us the power that we need in the strength of the spirit.

And in all honesty, you know, we're probably quite secure people, like financially, in terms of having, you know, on the whole, having homes we can go back to and those kind of things, but actually, that's not really true.

It's a bit of an illusion. Every breath we have, every heartbeat we have is numbered by him. He's the one who chooses the number of days we live for. He's the number, he's the one who chooses whether we continue to even breathe or our hearts beat.

[16:55] But, because of Christ, we're a kept people. He cares about us. We're not striving to buy security or to get it. We're a kept people.

When my days end and when your days end, if you're following Jesus, you can know where you're going and you can know that's done and that's a good thing. It's the number he's given us.

So in comparison to having to gain these things from an outside source, you and I, we get them in Christ and he is the one who provides for us. He gives us provision.

What an amazing list that is that in Christ you're led, you're given power, he keeps you, he provides for you. So Paul here is talking a lot against some of the influences coming into the Ephesian church from this Artemis temple but also some of the things we find in ourselves that we want more and more without end or that we're seeking stuff in the wrong context in terms of sexual immorality or that we might want to be above or put down people.

But in Christ we have all these wonderful things. Now, interesting, notice what he says at the end of verse 4. He gives you this list, greed, poneia, foolish, coarse talk and then he says, rather, thanksgiving.

[18:23] I don't know about you but somehow at first glance seems a bit kind of weak almost. A bit like, seriously, Paul, is that the answer? The answer to fighting temptation in a whole lot of different areas is giving thanks.

But the answer, I think, is yes. Because what you see is as if you're longing after, lasting after, wanting stuff that sort of seems out of reach, when you start to give thanks for who he is, for what he's done, you start to see what he's provided.

You start to see how he's led you. You start to remember when he's given you strength. You start to know again that he keeps you. You start to see again not what you haven't yet got that you might long for but what he has provided.

And thanksgiving moves us from a place of oh, I really want, I should have this, I need to get this to a place of rest. He has led me.

He gives me power to live. He keeps me. He provides for me. But what a beautiful thing and what a beautiful weapon that we have in thanksgiving.

[19 : 38] Like, because it will shift our perspective or remind us to set our clock to the truth that we are no longer in the dominion of darkness but we're in the kingdom of his son who does all these wonderful things for us.

I think, and you notice Paul ends the set of scriptures we're looking at as well with other ways of doing that. Verse 19, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, songs from the spirit. Sing, make music from your heart to the Lord. Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ. This is not just try hard. He's not just giving us a list of things to avoid or not to do. He's reminding you, you live in a new country now.

Not in the one of darkness. Not in the dominion of darkness but the one of his son. Now, I want to do a whole bit on Romans 6 here because I'd love to but we're running out of time so I'm just going to point you towards Romans 6.11 which says this, that you and I, we are to count ourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Jesus Christ.

[20 : 47] And it's the most beautiful accounting terms, the quick version, where it says, look at what is true. Look at the accounts. We're not doing a Peter Murrell.

Shouldn't get too political but we're not doing a let's just sort of fake it till we make it and pretend the accounts are good. What we're doing is we're looking at what Jesus has done and we're seeing he died for us.

We are now right with God. We live in a new place and we can count ourselves even when we're tempted to sin or when we do sin. We can say, hang on a second, that's the old, it's gone.

I am alive to God in Christ Jesus. So guys, in the light of this, you were once in darkness or you were once darkness, sorry, but now you are light in the Lord.

Live as children of light. I've got three things. I wonder if you'd pick one of them that you might do this week and maybe you do this already so then you can pick something else that's in the list but three things that I just think might be really helpful for us in the light of this that we no longer live in the dominion of darkness.

[22 : 01] We are children of the light. We may battle with things. Thanksgiving will help us a lot. So why don't we choose one of these three things for this week.

I would encourage you, pick a Bible verse that when you get up in the morning reminds you of what he has done in your life. So it might be that one from Colossians. He has delivered me from the dominion of darkness and into the kingdom of his son.

It might be this one here from Ephesians 5a. I was once in darkness now I'm light in the Lord.

Father help me live as light. But I'd encourage you maybe just with your morning alarm before you look at your phone or before you even speak to someone in the house just remember who you are in Christ because this is your new identity as one he has rescued.

Another option I think knowing what he has done is really key for us. And Thanksgiving is such a powerful weapon.

And maybe you're a really thankful person. I don't know about you but how thankful I am basically depends on my blood sugar levels. Depends how much of a snack I've had. But do you know what I'm going to do this week? I was thinking what's he going to learn for me to sort of listen to my own preach here?

[23 : 21] And what I'm going to do is I set alarms on my watch all the time because my wife will tell you I'm in a nightmare with time. And I'm going to set an alarm on my watch for the class that I find a total nightmare that I teach lasting on a Tuesday.

They're done. I'm done by last period. Jesus loves them but I wish they were not my class. Okay? And I'm going to set an alarm in my watch and I'm going to give thanks to them by name when they leave on Tuesday after school. And you can ask me next week if I've done it because I promise I will.

Because I am really struggling with these guys and yet I know that he is really good. He's led me to them. He gives me power to live with them and that he is my kind of keeper, my provider.

So I'm going to do that. That's my one. Or another one. I love these verses. In verse 10 and 17. Find out what pleases the Lord. Isn't that brilliant?

It's like, yes, that's our heart's desire. We want what pleases him. Or verse 17. Don't be foolish. Understand what the Lord's will is. I think they're brilliant. That's discipleship, right?

[24 : 19] Increasingly understand what he wants. I would encourage you a way of doing that. Again, maybe set an alarm at a time you know would be helpful. But just pause.

Sense him with you and ask him to be near you. You could even just say to him, Lord, what's your will right now for me? That can be whatever because he loves that.

He loves to walk and talk with us. As we do this walking as children of light, it's not a solo endeavour. It's not do it all by yourself in your own strength. See, I hope for me and for you an increasing sense of where are you, Lord, and what do you want from me just now would be something we do throughout the day.

And maybe it's something you do loads already, but I would encourage you. Why don't you set an alarm or something like that and just be with him. In the middle of whatever other chaos is going on. And ask him, show me your will just now. I bet you and me will be nicer humans the more we're doing that. So there's some encouragements for you. Know who you are. Know what he has done.

[25 : 26] Know what he wants. Take some time to be with him. Take some time to use thanksgiving as your weapon. And just remember your identity before all the other stuff that will crowd in your mind in the morning.

Take some time. Take some time. Take some time. Take some time. Take some time.