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SERIES: GROWING AND GOING

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TITLE: Let There Be Light Pt. 2

Galatians 5: 19-21 (NLT) tells us: ¹⁹ When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

Some will tell you that this is only referring to our rewards in Heaven, when Paul says “will not inherit the Kingdom of God”. That is incorrect. A proper and historical interpretation is, if your life can be encapsulated in this kind of lifestyle, you clearly are not a Christian, and you clearly are not saved. You are a child of darkness; you are separated from God. What Paul is *not* saying is that Christians cannot fall into sin, and, for a time, fall into sinful habits. However, we know from Scripture, that a life saved is a life changed. When we as Christians sin, we will have remorse. The Holy Spirit works in us to turn us around.

So are we capable of doing all those things as Christians? Absolutely - we are still human and still have sin in our lives. But again what Paul is saying is, if you are committed to any or all of these sinful behaviors - if you are a child of darkness - if you are a slave to sin – then you are not a Christian. When someone went to describe you, and they were to use these kinds of descriptions - you are clearly not a child of light. If this is your reputation, you’d better examine your soul.

And you know, that when living in the literal darkness, you can hurt yourself, and you can hurt other people. So too, when you live a life full of sin, you will hurt yourself, and you will hurt others. It is dangerous. You see, darkness is dangerous. It’s dangerous for you and your life. Darkness is living apart from God and living for your sins.

What are the results of living in the darkness?

First, we’ll experience physical, temporal pain, and suffering.

That’s not what the culture says. The culture says, “No, what people do in private – in the darkness – that’s their business. As long as it doesn’t hurt anyone...” But you and I know it hurts them and it hurts other people. People who are a slave to their sin - when asked: “How well is it working for you?” When pressed, and honest, they’ll say, “Not well. My life is a mess.”

Living in the darkness, people go from one partner to another; From one fix to another; From one credit card to another; From one porn site to another; From one job to another; From one fight to the next. Nothing seems to satisfy, because life in the darkness tears them apart. It affects their family – their friends – their work – everything.

Physical, temporal pain is the consequence of sin. In fact, this was seen after the world's first sin. After Adam and Eve sinned, according to Genesis 3, women would experience pain in childbirth, and there would be opposition in marriage. Life would not be easy, but instead, full of work, pain, hardship, and ultimately death. In other words, life in the Garden went from perfect to constant struggle. Our living in the darkness - our sinful actions – our life apart from God - will bring pain and suffering: Physical pain; mental struggle; emotional hurts; spiritual darkness. Darkness is dangerous and it brings pain and suffering.

Paul would say as much in Galatians. Paul wrote, “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. ⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life” (Gal. 6:7-8,ESV) Your actions have a very real cause and effect relation.

This is why you'll never hear a farmer say, “I'm shocked! I planted a bunch of corn seeds and look at that – I have a pumpkin patch!” You don't hear that, because what you reap is what you sow.

When you live in the darkness, you get a life of falling down and hurting yourself.

If you live a life as a gossip, you'll lose friends quickly.

If you live a life of selfishness, you'll be alone.

If you live a life of bitterness, you'll be miserable.

If you live a life of physical abuse, you'll be physically broken.

The list just goes on.

And eventually, living in the darkness will end in death. Sometimes, God will call one of His children home. And other times, as Psalm 1 says, “the way of the wicked will perish.” At some point, the brokenness of a dark world takes us out.

So the result of living in the darkness is physical, temporal pain, and suffering. But it gets worse, **if you never leave the darkness, you'll experience eternal pain and suffering.**

Proverbs 14:12 says, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.” When people live a life apart from God – a life in the darkness – no matter how “good” they appear, their future is eternal pain and suffering. They can be a philanthropist. They can be the best caseworker. They can be a fantastic teacher. They can host great dinners for those in need. But, if they are living apart from God in the darkness, it will only lead to spiritual death.

Well that's not very politically correct of me. You're right. God's Word will never be politically correct. But it's reality. And that's why we need to go back to the Bible – it's true!

The wages of sin is death, as Paul would say.

Paul would punch this in his second letter to the Thessalonians. Paul would write, “Since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you,⁷ and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels⁸ in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.⁹ They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might” (2 Thess. 1:6-9).

At the end of this life, it’s not nothing. It’s not a second shot. It’s not a series of do-overs. It’s not purgatory. No. For those who never come out of the light, those who never repent of their sins and turn to Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior - it is eternal destruction – pain and suffering away from God forever.

DISCUSSION:

N: Let me bring in Cara Whitney and Arnie Cole for some discussion. Cara and Arnie – I’d like to hear from each of you – was there a point in your life when you realized that you were living in darkness? If so, how did you come to that realization?

C: Well, I don't think it's anything that happens overnight. It took me, I would say years, to realize that I was the problem. I used to identify, Nat, as a Libertarian. [Hm.] I guess I thought that you were free to do whatever you wanted, as long as it didn't affect other people negatively – sort of like that idea of Socialism that people have. It looks great on paper, but to actually live free in that way, it's just hogwash, because sin always affects other people. And then I started exploring Christianity, and I realized that my problems were the result of my choices. And so you stop making excuses for yourself, and stop blaming other people, you know? I think when you blame someone else, it gives you an excuse to be sinful. So to kind of - to be truly free - you have to enter into that personal relationship with Jesus. And then He shows you that better way - not an easier way - because people are still going to wrong us. But I think we just deal with rejection and things differently. And we don't use that as an excuse for bad behavior. So, when you're tired of making excuses, Jesus is waiting for you, I guess.

N: Right. So it wasn't necessarily a moment that the light turned on, but rather a progressive journey, where you started putting pieces together. But I do think there is a key element of what you just said. It comes to that moment where you take responsibility for your actions, and you no longer blame other people, blame God, blame parents, whatever - when you say, “No, no, no, no. I'm here because I chose to be here. And the only way out is through Jesus Christ.” Arnie, what about you?

A: Well, I wasn't as smart as Cara, and it didn't go quite as fast, but I know, about when I was 30, there were two incidents that I knew I was living in total darkness. And one was during the Long Beach Grand Prix, we were partying on a yacht, and afterwards somebody had left my favorite drug. So I consumed the whole thing that night, and started to overdose, and prayed for God to save me, even though I wasn't a believer. That's when I started thinking, “Man, this is

dark”. And then, I remember another time after partying all night, and had to be at a meeting of all of these professionals. On my way there, I urinated all over myself, and it's like, “Man, something's dark. This is a problem here.” Now, it took me 17 years to figure out it was Jesus Christ that I needed. But I do remember those two incidents, as like, “wow”. And then I went through this thing – “this is all there is, so you might as well party, because there's nothing left”. So it was a slow process for me.

C: For me though - I would say Nat - that I came to Jesus first in my mind - like I believed it was real, because I studied - used Apologetics to prove the Resurrection happened. I gave my life to Christ - didn't feel anything. It wasn't until - you have to be in the Word. He started changing my heart, and my perspective on things. And so I realized then, that I was the problem, that I needed to change. I remember I blamed my parents for a lot of stuff, and there were some things they could take responsibility for. But at the end of the day, I think the biggest change in my life occurred when I called my mom up, and asked for her forgiveness, because of the things I was thinking about her - they weren't right. The things I was doing were my choice. And by doing that too - I think it showed my mom - it let my mom off the hook for things she was blaming herself for. Yeah. So, gosh, man, Jesus just does this number on you. And through that, it radiated to the people in my life. Right?

N: Right. Well, it is progressive, but I think that it is built upon layers. And for many of us, it does come down to initially the intellectual exercise of evaluating the evidence, evaluating what the claims are, and then bit by bit, letting our heart follow suit. But as we know, it's the Holy Spirit who ultimately does the saving - no amount of love, no amount of evidence can possibly persuade someone into the Kingdom of God. But at the end of the day, it is the Holy Spirit who does the saving. Before we tail off, I'm just curious. There was something you said, Arnie, that I'd like to just dig a little bit deeper on. You talked about, you know, urinating yourself and just living in the darkness, but you thought it was light, right? I mean, you thought it was a good thing. In other words – right - you're living the life, you're partying it up, and it sounds - it's what the world desires. I mean, I remember working as a server at The Olive Garden years ago, and this gal, she came in, and she just looked like a train wreck. I mean, it was a rough night - and I go, “Well, what happened last night?” She goes, “Oh, it was a great time. Went to the party, got drunk, passed out, hit my head, puked all over”. And she goes, “I'm going to do it again tonight”. And I remember looking at her, going, “That does not sound like a lot of fun, nor a good way of spending your evening”. But for her, it made sense. And I don't know where she is today, but why do you think so many people keep going back to those destructive habits, and living in the darkness, but it does seem to me like they think it really is living in the light? It's freeing.

A: I would think not, in the fact the light is - there is no light. So, in other words, you have hope in nothing. [Hmm]. So, it's like, you know - you've got all of your goals met, and you've got more than you've ever wanted. And it still means nothing. So your light is really nothing. And I don't know if that makes sense or not, but it's all - you know, it's like one of my boats was named *Uno Mas* - you know, “One More”. It's always one more party, one more, one more - pretty soon it gets pretty tiresome. So I think it's the absence of light, and just becoming comfortable with the

darkness.

C: Well, I think sometimes too, things look - you know, it says Satan will just, you know, disguise it well, and you have these buddies that you're partying with, and you seem like you're this pretty tight crew. You know - you just had that interview with the guy from Moody, who's the professor there now. And you know, when he went to make the phone calls for someone to bail him out of jail, nobody was around. I mean, they seem like they're your friends, and they're having a good time, but you know, one thing my husband tells my son and daughter, is that "at some point, you've got to cash the check". So what choices you're making now, at some point, you cash that check, and what's in there. So they're not your friends - your drug dealer isn't your buddy. And, you know, there's a lot of things that look good, but they're really not that good.

Knowing that life without Jesus Christ brings eternal destruction should make us all ask the question, "How can we escape this physical, temporal cycle of pain and suffering? How can we escape the eternal pain and suffering? It's by coming to the light of Christ. It's by relishing and living in the light. How?"

Light begins by living in relationship with God.

Jesus would say in John 14:6 (ESV), "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." There is no other way to God – no other way to have a relationship with God - except by living in the light through Jesus Christ.

This is why Paul would write to the church in Colossae, "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son."(Col. 1:13)

Living in relationship with God is made possible by The Light: Jesus Christ.

Jesus said in John 8:12, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

Christ is the light. His light shines so we won't stumble. We know that in the darkness, we fall down. We hurt ourselves and others. It's a mess. But Christ's light shines for the believer, so we can avoid so much self-inflicted pain and suffering. Ultimately, He saves us from the eternal darkness.

Jesus said, "I have come into the world as light so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness" (John 12:46). Jesus is our rescuer. He is the one who reaches into the darkness purely as a gift and says, "Live! And live in the light!" Peter would say that Jesus called us out of darkness into His marvelous light! No more stepping on the Legos in the dark; No more having to trip over luggage and boxes in the dark. No! The light – Jesus Christ – in pure grace offers us freedom from the darkness and brings us into His marvelous light.

Darkness is living apart from God and for our sinful desires; **Light is living for God and for His glory.**

Let me read you what Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus because he says this so well.

“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

³ But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. ⁴ Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. ⁵ For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. ⁷ Therefore do not become partners with them; ⁸ *for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light* ⁹ *(for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true)*, ¹⁰ *and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.* ¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. ¹³ But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, ¹⁴ for anything that becomes visible is light. (Eph. 5:1-13)

Our lives are to be light in a dark world. Our light exposes the darkness and all it hides. Yes, it's true - light stings. Yet, it is convicting. But when there is light, there is freedom and a way back to God. If you're listening and you're tired of living in the dark, you're tired of living a life of pain and suffering, and you're saying to yourself, “Enough is enough. An eternity of pain and suffering is too much to bear.” If this is you, Christ says, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Mat. 11:28-30)

How can you come to Christ? How can you experience the light? Simply believe. Trust in Jesus Christ as your only way out of the darkness and into the glorious light of God. Believe in your whole self that Jesus Christ came, died, and rose again for your sins. Trust in Him and your life will be changed forever. Mine was.

The majority of you - you were once trapped in the darkness. You were living apart from God and living for your sinful desires. But thanks be to God, you were rescued from the darkness by Jesus Christ, and now you live as children of light. As children of light, Jesus is saying, “Let there be light in your neighborhood! Let your light shine in your city! Let your light shine in your texts. Let your light shine on social media. Let your light shine!” Don't hide your light. Don't be ashamed, but instead be bold by letting people see, who you are in Christ. Go tell the people in your life about how you were once the recipient of great pain and suffering, by living in the darkness, but now you're free! You're living in the light. And they can live in the light as well!

Maybe you've been rescued from the darkness, but you've let your light grow dim by sin. You've slowly crept back into the shadows. If this is you, Christ says, “Enough! Come home and repent of those sins. Let me restore that light! You're no longer a slave to the darkness. Repent! Confess! I'm coming soon. Get to work!” Friend, whatever we do, in all we do, let us do it for the glory of God. Let our light shine, so the world might believe.

Heavenly Father, thank you for saving us and for making us a child of Light. God, if our light has grown dim, convict us and call us back quickly. For those who are listening, who have never called out from the darkness, I pray that you will penetrate their hearts, and that they will cry out to you today. For all of us who are your children, please allow our light to shine, so that the world might see it, and that they might believe. In your Son's name, we pray. Amen.

N: All right. This seems like a great time to bring in my discussion partners, Cara Whitney, and Arnie Cole. Cara, was there a person, or group of people, who at different times brought the light of Christ into your life - back when you were still in the darkness?

C: My short answer is no, because in my darkest days there was not one person. But after I was married, I wasn't a Christian yet, but I was really thinking about spiritual things. So after I had my kids, I got really curious about the existence of God. And I wanted something spiritual for my kids, so they didn't grow up to make the same choices that I did. So I started seeking God, and I would sit in the front of our tour bus with our bus driver, and have coffee with him, when Dan and the kids were sleeping. His name is Beamon and as it turned out, he happened to be a Christian. So he was really helpful. So I would ask him questions, and he would respond in a lot of ways. We were talking about - I call it Christianese - so talking about the blood - seemed really weird to me, but I really respected him. And he seemed like such a calm person. And so, he gave me his testimony. His mom was married like 14 times, and he lived on the streets when he was 12, and so Beamon, his life was cleaned up significantly with Jesus. But this is what's crazy, Nat. He was driving Christian bands around and things. And when he was let go from that, and signed up to be our tour bus driver, his church went to him, and told him that he shouldn't drive a comedian around - should not drive Larry the Cable Guy around. I don't know if they were thinking we were out partying like Mötley Crüe. So I'm just really thankful that Beamon was obedient to Jesus, and not to religious people, because he was a great witness to me. But I would say, I wasn't living in darkness, as I mean, I was curious - so God put this man in my life for this reason. But mostly, I was discipled by social media, Nat - so Ravi, Greg Laurie, Frank Turek, Back to the Bible - because nobody was coming to me.

N: So I'm curious then, because you know - so often you find - maybe a child who was abandoned by a mother or father, and because of that, they have this hunger and desire to step up when it's their turn. How much has that lack of personal light impacted your personal evangelism? I would have to think it would motivate you to go out there and be more bold.

C: It's my total motivation; that's it. I just want - I don't want people to feel the way I felt, which is lost - which like Arnie says, "Is this all there is?" Everybody at some point has that question, or they feel like they were born to be bad, or that they were born with no purpose. Maybe God made a mistake. That isn't true, and so I just want people to know; I want to give people enough information to make that choice.

N: That's excellent advice. Yeah. It would seem to me that, you know, when the culture does get darker - or as you've put it more clear - I think this is a great opportunity. It's not a moment for us to go on a retreat, or to panic. This is a chance for our light to shine brighter than ever before. Again, we're beginning to see who's actually a Christian, and who's not. What is really going on out there, is actually helping us prepare the soil for the Gospel, and preparing us to shine brighter than ever. And so, as I think about this - being light in the darkness, let's face it - It can be pretty unpopular at times. And I know there are people listening today who are thinking, "I know I should. I know God has called me to it, but I'm scared. I'm nervous. I don't know what to expect." Talk to them, encourage them, as to why they should bring that light, regardless of what's happening around them.

C: I would say, ask yourself this question. Do you love yourself more than other people? [Ah, ouch]. Because bringing light to dark situations and people is the most loving thing that you can do.

A: Yeah. You know, you've got a light. You've got to let it shine. We sing that song as little kids, and now's the time to be bold and take a stand. And that doesn't mean take a political stand - It means, take a stand for Jesus.

N: I would encourage us all in this room, and those listening today: Remember what Paul wrote in Romans 1:16, *I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes*. And so when we think about going into the darkness, yeah, it's dark. It's a mess, but we have got the light of Jesus Christ. We do not need to be ashamed, and we do not need to be afraid. Instead, we can go with confidence that God is with us. He is for us. And He is on a mission to save the lost.