

Rev. Nathan Decker
“Living as Lights in the World”

Introduction

The speech this morning revolves around one fundamental question. It is a question that each one of you must face honestly and personally. I say *honestly* because each of you must reckon with the fact that you stand before the living God of heaven and earth. Do not in any way blow this question off as though it is no big deal. There is no question more important for you to face than this one. I say *personally* because whenever there is talk about Christian living, the temptation is always to look at everyone else and be critical about how they are living, and in the process of doing that, take your eyes off yourself. This morning it is all about you, your life, and your walk before God. Honestly and personally face the very simple question: light or darkness? Does my life in all of its areas more resemble light or darkness? In 1 Thessalonians 5, the apostle Paul identifies two distinct groups of children: children of light and children of darkness. He writes in verse 5, “Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day; we are not of the night, nor of darkness.” By the grace of God through the work of Jesus Christ alone, when as a young Christian you read 1 Thessalonians 5:5 and grapple with the question, “To which group do I belong?,” you can say with confidence, “I am a child of light.” Young people, you are the children of light! In these perilous last times, live as children of the light!

Light and Darkness

Is there any starker contrast between two realities in the entire world than between light and darkness? The answer to that question is no! That is true according to the will of God, who created a world in which there are these two antithetical realities of light and darkness. God created the world in such a way that every 24-hour period there is set before the Christian the truth of 1 Thessalonians 5. There is a period of the day in which there is light and there is period of the night in which there is darkness. Always you have set before your minds, therefore, the spiritual truths that are represented by light and darkness. Light is a picture of everything that is of God: God Himself, Jesus Christ, the kingdom of God, the truth, holiness, righteousness, salvation, and heaven. Darkness is a picture of their opposites, everything that is opposed to God: Satan himself, all of the fallen angels, the kingdom of darkness, the lie, sin, unrighteousness, death, and hell.

What is so instructive about light and darkness is that the contrast between the two is so clear. You don't mistake light for darkness or darkness for light. When you look outside during the day, unmistakably you see the light of that day. When you look outside at night, unmistakably you see the darkness of the night. Young people of the church, you are children of the light and not the children of darkness! It is with the same sharpness that when others look at you, what they *must* see is the light of Jesus Christ shining forth brightly. I say that fully cognizant of the fact that there is in each one of us an old man of sin that is drawn toward the realm of darkness. Nevertheless, by the grace of God you have been transformed into the kingdom of God. You have in you the new man of Jesus Christ. And what that means is that light of the life of Jesus Christ *must* shine forth very sharply. Let the emphasis fall on the "*must*" of the previous sentence! If you are the children of the day and light, which by the grace of God you are, then the light of salvation that is you must be clear for all to see in all of your life.

It is certainly the case that you must show yourself to be the children of light in every area of your life. Jesus' summary of the commandments to love God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself is all-encompassing. However, what I would like to do now is highlight a few areas of your life in which the light of Jesus Christ must shine forth clearly and brightly. These are areas that are especially important when you consider the nature of the last and perilous days in which you are living.

Use of Technology

In the first place, that you are children of light will show itself in the proper and godly use of technology. You live in the days of smart phones, tablets, laptops, texting, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and all the rest. The fact is that none of these technologies are going to disappear, but all of them will become more advanced and more accessible as time goes on. How many smart phones and tablets are not spread throughout this camp as we sit here this morning? I know for a fact that there are many. That would have been impossible at a convention a few years ago. The problem is that what we see in the world around us has made inroads into the church among adults and young people, not only with respect to what is accessed on these devices (which Rev. Eriks addressed already), but with respect very simply to the *use* of these devices. The issue is that there is an *addiction* to the use of technology, particularly to the cell phone. Walk down any downtown street, go to any ball game, sit at any restaurant, and what see everywhere are faces buried in phone screens. There is an addiction to swiping, checking,

messaging, and texting! And I see it among the young people especially! Minutes, much less hours, can hardly go by without needing to interact with a device. What I'm not advocating is that you all take your phones and throw them into the pool (although for some, that may be the very best thing to do). What I urge you to do is consider where your heart is with respect to your use of technology. It is a spiritual matter. Addictions of any and every sort are idols. Any idol damages your relationship to God and fellow believers. Any idol makes you earthly minded, keeping you in these last days from watching for the return of Jesus Christ. As children of day, simply in the manner in which you *use technology*, are you living as children of the light?

Enjoyment of Entertainment

Second, that you are the children of the light will show itself in your refusal to consume the entertainment of this world. I mention this point because there are few areas of life that distinguish you as children of light as sharply from the children of darkness than the entrainment that is consumed. I mention this point also because the devil is shoving the entertainment of this world down your throats as fast and hard as he possible can. You have to face the question: in which kingdom do all of the movies and music and television shows belong—the kingdom of darkness or the kingdom of light? The answer to that question is crystal clear. All of it belongs to the realm of darkness. What a contradiction it is, therefore, when you who are children of light not only dabble in once awhile (which is bad enough), but run headlong into that whole realm of entertainment.

You may have heard the saying, “You are what you eat.” That is true physically. If you consume exclusively unhealthy food, your body inevitably will be unhealthy. That is also true spiritually. You must consume spiritually healthy food in order to be spiritually strong. You read the scriptures, listen to these speeches, sit under the preaching of the gospel, and participate in devotions in order to ingest spiritually edifying food. The fact is that the whole realm of entertainment is also the spiritual food industry, and the devil knows it. When you consume the entertainment of the world, you are not only eating spiritually unhealthy food, but really what amounts to poison for the soul, which corrupts your mind and makes you calloused in your hearts toward sin. As children of the day, with respect to the godless entertainment of this world, are you living as children of light?

Life in the Church

Third, that you are children of the light will show itself in these last days by your view of and participation in the church of Jesus Christ. You have to ask the questions: How do I approach the worship of God's name? With what attitude do I go to catechism? What is the nature of my participation at church functions? Is there a genuine desire to grow spiritually through young people's discussions? Is there a using of the gifts that God has given to me for the sake of the other members of the body of Christ? But it all comes down to this: What does the church mean to me? As children of the light, it must mean everything! That must be true because of who is in the church, namely, Jesus Christ. As children of the light who are still sinners, you need the one is the light of the world. You need Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ is found only in the church. Through your life in the church, especially in hearing every week the preaching of the gospel, you become illumined by the words of Christ, enabling you to go forth in all your life letting your light shine in the entire world. As children of the day, with respect to your attitude toward and life in the church, are you living as children of light?

Conclusion

The blessing of living as children of the light is that for you Jesus Christ will not come as a thief in the night. For the children of darkness, that is exactly what will take place. 1 Thessalonians 5:3-4 says, "For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief." When you live as children of light, front and center in everything is Jesus. Because you love Jesus, you strive to put down and fight against the idols of technology in your life. Because you love Jesus, you don't consume the ungodly entertainment of the world. Because you love Jesus, you love his church. In other words, as children of the light, you live in all things a Christ-centered life. No surprise it will be, then, when he returns on the clouds of glory. What a day of rejoicing that will be to see your Savior face to face! Young people, you are the children of light! Live as children of light! Do so watching for the return of Jesus Christ!