

Lord, strengthen me to speak and act as You desire. *Unlike the demon possessed man who was mute, I have too often opened my mouth with hurtful, untruthful words against my neighbor and yes, even against You.* Replace all foul talk from my mouth with praise for You and encouragement for my brothers and sisters in Christ, *for by Your grace You have translated me from darkness to Light.* Amen. (The Lutheran Study Bible, CPH, p. 2024, *adapted*).

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. 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. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true).

In Christ Jesus, upon whom the wrath of God for our disobedience was poured out in hell's deepest darkness, dear fellow redeemed:

Or shall I say, children of obedience? That is who you are now in Christ. Yes, you and I were conceived and born as children of disobedience, having rebelled against the heavenly Father in our sin from the very moment of our existence. Physically it was dark in our mothers' wombs, but it was also spiritually dark. That may not seem fair, certainly not American, that we had no opportunity to show ourselves to be children of obedience after we were born, but that is how God describes us from the very first, possessing original sin.

But things are different now. Not that we no longer have original sin, but we have been born again in Christ. This triumph over Satan and his kingdom of darkness is entirely the gracious work of God upon us. By the finger of God as mentioned in our Gospel lesson, Satan and his kingdom was driven out of us. So consider what it means that **Once You Were Darkness, But Now You Are Light in the Lord.**

I

You might remember that after Jesus instructed Nicodemus, who came to Him under the cover of darkness, about the concept of the need of being born again, Jesus made these comments: "the Light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than

the Light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the Light and does not come to the Light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

Were these words spoken because Nicodemus came to Jesus when it was dark? Perhaps. As a Pharisee, Nicodemus was accustomed to hiding his unrighteousness attempting to have his neighbors behold his acts of righteousness only. In truth he did come to the Light. He came to Christ Jesus in search for the true light and whether he discovered that night he found the true Light, he would eventually know and trust in that Light, which while exposing his sin, rejoiced to stand upon the works of God in his behalf.

This is the case for you too, my fellow sinners. We gather here week after week. This Light exposes our many sins for sure, but we are not fearful, since we stand upon the works of God in our behalf. We get to "be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us ..." And we now get to "[w]alk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true)."

II

Satan loves to deceive. If he can convince us that actually God is holding out on us and the true light is found in our carnal delights, he will have succeeded in bringing us back into the darkness. So Paul warns: "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience." Satan has many voices in the world, which come to us with their empty words of deceit.

Pop psychology says that the morality with which you were raised by your parents only served to repress you. Your carnal desires are not evil, but wholesome and need to be set free. In truth, your natural feelings are not pure, but selfishly corrupt and destructive. "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."

Often times in the evening I will watch some older sitcoms on television, which cause one to laugh at our many human foibles especially as we relate to one another in our common human experiences. But by contrast I have also found myself laughing at sitcoms of more recent creations and it is laughter over immoral situations like fornication, slander and hatred. Should I be concerned? Most certainly I should. Our Lord's words through the

Apostle Paul get my attention: “Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place.”

Do they get your attention? Perhaps there is a group of friends, acquaintances, or even relatives, who present such experiences for you. They operate in the realm of darkness and more than just being exposed to it, you are drawn in as a participant. Perhaps not actively, but passively, giving the impression by polite smiles and continuing presence that you condone such activities. What shall you do?

III

You cannot do a thing. But our Lord can and does. By His power at work in and upon you, He translates you from darkness to light. He takes you the sinner and creates a saint, a holy one, of His own making. It is first and foremost based on His work in your place. He lived the holy life you fail to produce and then took that holy life giving it in exchange for your sinful life and paid the entire punishment for all your sin, even the sin you still commit as a saint now.

Living as one who not only knows this is what your Lord has done for you but living as one who trusts in these works of your Savior, you now have power to live as one of His children of obedience. Paul writing to the Philippian Christians pointed out to them as children of obedience that “it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.” He acknowledged that they too lived in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, as we do today. But they, like you, were able to shine as lights in the world, since they held fast to the Word of life.

Satan desires to engulf you in his kingdom of darkness once again, but you now have a desire to live in the Light as you have come to know it in Christ. In humility you have been called to live in the Light. So you are not on a course of self-righteous condemnation, but a course of gentleness, peace and love. It is almost inevitable that if a child of obedience extracts him or herself from the tents of wickedness, he or she will be falsely accused of diabolical disobedience, just as our Lord was in our Gospel lesson. So we are in good company.

But living in the Light for us means a constant exposing of our sin, even our sin of self-righteousness. As we see it active in our hearts and minds, we repent and find forgiveness in Christ Jesus. Our Lord is not surprised to find sinners among His children of obedience. By His grace however we have passed from the kingdom of darkness into His everlasting kingdom of Light. Our filthiness, foolish talk and crude joking has been replaced with unmuted voices

of thanksgiving and praise for the One who has regenerated us. And now, instead of speaking curses upon our neighbors who even sin against us, we get to bless in the name of our mutual Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.