

Walking in the Light: Battle (Part 1)

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This Sunday we took up part 2 of 'Walking in the Light' which is about becoming free of the things that bind us to the old ways. Justin Martyr, a first century christian apologist and philosopher describes, in his First Apology, what he calls, 'Primal battles'. For Justin, a primal area is one that is particularly hard to change and which involves a deeper spiritual stronghold. Among others, Justin outlines the following three primal battles:



Sexuality and Temptation

Wealth & acquisition

Xenophobia

We considered the theme of walking with God through the lens of battle on Sunday. The christian life will enrol us in a battle. Our text (Ephesians 4:17-5:14) gives attention to the first of these areas, namely, sexuality and temptation. The church in Ephesus, planted by Paul, knew about temptation and idols. Stephen encouraged us not to moralise the Ephesian Christians but instead to recognise our own communities' challenges through the Apostle Paul's epistle. Stephen summarised some trends in today's culture when it comes to sexuality:

- 1. Increasingly, young people are rejecting social controls (family, church, state, institutions) for accepting norms and replacing them with the autonomy of self expression.*
- 2. Proliferation of online expressions of sexuality that are unhealthy.*
- 3. Early sexualisation of young people.*
- 4. Increasing sexual habits that many would describe as addiction.*
- 5. Increasing exposure of, and intolerance of sexual harassment and yet a lack of engagement in the causes of inappropriate sexual behaviour.*

We turned to Ephesians for help and found that Paul describes the problem for humanity in at least two ways. Firstly, we are under the 'Old Adam Nature'. Humanity was subject to death and decay caused by sin. Sin is NOT stubbing your toe and swearing but rather humanity doing what's right in their own eyes and suffering the consequences of God's judgement. Sin is a condition, the propensity of humanity which becomes orientated towards self, separated from the life of God (Eph. 4:17-19). Secondly, the powers of evil cause wider harm and need to be defeated (Eph. 4: 27 & supporting text Col. 2: 15). Furthermore, because God is a God of justice he will not allow evil to continue in the Kingdom of God (Eph. 5:5) God's judgement on sin is death. A death caused by humanity turning away from God, the source of truth and life. For Paul, the solution to this problem is

the death and resurrection of Jesus. Through Jesus' death he takes upon the curse (of death) and offers new (resurrected) life. Resurrection begins now, for Paul, chiefly through a new relationship with God, empowered by the wider release of God's Holy Spirit and experienced now as a RESURRECTED MIND (Eph. 4:23). We learn to put off the old nature and put on the new nature.

All of this life Paul exhorts is dependent upon being IN CHRIST. That's why we should read the whole of Ephesians before we give thought to Paul's instructions in the latter chapters. The first half of Ephesians is the story of the Gospel. The story of being chosen, rescued, loved and whereby God makes a new humanity. Our solution to sexual temptation is the good news that where sin runs deep Christ's grace always runs deeper. Through a new connection with God (5:1) as dearly loved children we learn to be awake and alert (Eph 5:14) and engage in a battle for sexual purity. Stephen outlined 7 movements that can help us develop a better battle plan:

1. A sober evaluation of the harm/cost of sin
2. Uncomfortable honesty (with trusted others)
3. Empowering vision (lifting our expectations to the possibility of freedom)
4. Definite Action
5. Holding hope for wholeness
6. Encouraging the friendship of the Holy Spirit
7. Resting in the assurance of Christ's victory (His grace never runs dry)

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.