


**“A Worthwhile Life”**  
**Ephesians 5:8-20**  
**Holiday Island Presbyterian Church**  
**August 19, 2018**

<sup>8</sup>for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light <sup>9</sup>(for the fruit of the Light *consists* in all goodness and righteousness and truth), <sup>10</sup>trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. <sup>11</sup>Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; <sup>12</sup>for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. <sup>13</sup>But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. <sup>14</sup>For this reason it says,

“Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you.”

<sup>15</sup>Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise,<sup>16</sup> making the most of your time, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup>So then do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is. <sup>18</sup>And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup>speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; <sup>20</sup>always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;

**INTRODUCTION:**

**In this portion of Paul’s letter to the church at Ephesus,  
he turns the attention of the people  
towards what it takes to live a “worthwhile” life.**

**Paul starts out by reminding them what the people once were  
before they accepted Christ into their lives.**

**They were living in darkness –  
- indeed, they were darkness.**

**In effect, Paul is saying:**

**“This is where you came from . . .  
 . . . this is where you are . . .  
 . . . and this is where you should be heading.”**

**To make what he is saying more understandable,  
 Paul uses the illustration of light.**

**ILLUSTRATION OF LIGHT:**

**Paul says not only were you living in darkness –  
 - without the light of Christ in your lives –  
 - you *were* darkness.**

**The simplest definition of darkness is the absence of light.**

**Philosophically, it could be argued that only light exists –  
 in greater or lesser amounts –  
 since darkness is the absence of light  
 it does not exist on its own;  
 it is a product of lesser light.**

**Poetically – and biblically – we think of darkness and light  
 as two opposing entities or forces  
 that do battle with each other.**

**When Paul says “you were darkness”  
 he means that we were submitted to “the forces of darkness.”**

**To quote John Calvin: “Apart from Christ,  
 the prince of darkness occupies everything.”**

**But if darkness is the absence of light, darkness always loses.**

**Even in Biblical terms:**

**“Light shined in the darkness and the darkness was not able to extinguish it.” (John 1:5)**

**The good news is that by accepting the truth of Jesus, we have been rescued from the dominion of darkness and we have inherited the kingdom of light.**

**Christ is the light of the world –  
union with Him results in us being heirs  
to the kingdom of God – the kingdom of light.**

**Paul uses the illustration of light  
because of its power over darkness.**

**When exposed to the light of Christ,  
evil can no longer hide or pretend to be something else.**

### **GOOD VS. GODLY**

**Paul then says that because we have been rescued from darkness we must be about the business of doing  
“what is pleasing to the Lord.”**

**This is where this all becomes very subjective –  
- trying to discover and determine  
“what is pleasing to the Lord.”**

**One interpretation of this phrase is  
to be doing good works.**

**However, doing good works is only a small portion  
of what Paul means.**

**Paul is saying that belief – faith –  
spills over into action –  
- action that produces good works.**

**Good works are the result of our faith.**

**Because of our faith, we seek to do those things  
which the world calls “good.”**

**And we do them not simply to please God –**

**- for that would be a form of bribery –**

**- we do them because we are *called and equipped* to do them.**

**A moral life – a worthwhile life - arises from faith;**

**from the knowledge of what God has done for us  
and our response to that knowledge.**

**You see, good works can be done**

**without faith or knowledge of God**

**and that does not mean it is worthless.**

**It just isn't a response to anything other than**

**what we think is good for the planet or humanity.**

**CS Lewis wrote a book called *Screwtape Letters*.**

**I recommend it to you.**

**You can pick up a used copy for about \$2**

**and a PDF version is available on line free.**

**The book is a very satirical account of a devil named Screwtape**

**who is advising his nephew, Wormwood –**

**- an apprentice demon –**

**- how to draw people away from God.**

**Part of that advice is based upon the premise**

**that for something to be “good”**

**it must be good 100% of the time.**

**Something that is good only part of the time**

**– even 99% - is not good in a biblical sense.**

**In one of his letters, Screwtape says:**

**“It does not matter how small the sins are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed, the safest road to Hell is the gradual one--the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.”**

**We try to convince ourselves that because we do good “things” that we are pleasing God.**

**What God wants is a *relationship* – not a contractor.**

**It is like the husband who says:**

**“Of course, I love you. Look at all I do for you.”**

**While the busyness of what he has been doing keeps his attention upon what he *does* and not for whom does it.**

**Screwtape says the quickest way to separate a human from God is to get them busy doing good things.**

**There is a story that goes something like this:**

**Satan called a worldwide convention of demons.**

**In his opening address he said,**

**"We can't keep Christians from going to church." "We can't keep them from reading their Bibles and knowing the truth."**

**"We can't even keep them from forming an intimate relationship with their savior."**

**"Once they gain that connection with Jesus, our power over them is broken." "So let them go to their churches; let them**

**have their covered dish dinners, BUT steal their time, so they don't have time to develop a relationship with Jesus Christ."**

**"This is what I want you to do," said the devil: "Distract them from gaining hold of their Savior and maintaining that vital connection throughout their day!"**

**"How shall we do this?" his demons shouted.**

**"Keep them busy in the non-essentials of life and invent innumerable schemes to occupy their minds," he answered. "Tempt them to spend, spend, spend, and borrow, borrow, borrow."**

**"Over-stimulate their minds so that they cannot hear that still, small voice."**

**"Entice them to play the radio or CD player whenever they drive." To keep the TV, VCR, CDs and their PCs going constantly in their home and see to it that every store and restaurant in the world plays non-biblical music constantly." "This will jam their minds and break that union with Christ."**

**"Fill the coffee tables with magazines and newspapers."**

**"Pound their minds with the news 24 hours a day." "Invade their driving moments with billboards." "Flood their mailboxes with junk mail, mail order catalogs, sweepstakes, and every kind of newsletter and promotional offering free products, services and false hopes.."**

**"Give them Santa Claus to distract them from teaching their children the real meaning of Christmas." "Give them an Easter bunny so they won't talk about his resurrection and**

power over sin and death."

"Even in their recreation, let them be excessive." "Have them return from their recreation exhausted." "Keep them too busy to go out in nature and reflect on God's creation. Send them to amusement parks, sporting events, plays, concerts, and movies instead."

"Keep them busy, busy, busy!"

"Crowd their lives with so many good causes they have no time to seek power from Jesus." "Soon they will be working in their own strength, sacrificing their health and family for the good of the cause."

**Screwtape said it this way to his nephew:**

**"Use (vague and misleading) thought is to distract (people) from their real dangers. We direct the fashionable outcry of each generation against those vices of which it is in the least danger and fix its approval on the virtue that is nearest the vice which we are trying to make endemic. The game is to have them all running around with fire extinguishers whenever there's a flood; and all crowding to that side of the boat which is already (sinking)."**

**So, Paul warns against doing those things  
which lead away from God.**

**When the light of Christ  
shines in the darkness of our souls and minds,  
it provides the catalyst for us doing benevolent things.**

**BE CAREFUL HOW YOU WALK:**

**We live in an age of great advances in knowledge, medicine, science.  
Things which were not possible even a generation ago  
are now commonplace.**

**We are face with the artificial creation of life  
and the artificial prolonging of life  
and on the other hand of deciding  
when a life will be terminated –  
- either by euthanasia or abortion.**

**These advances call for us to deeply ponder  
what is and is not worthy.**

**One of my favorite quotes is from Jurassic Park:  
“Simply because something can be done, does not mean it  
should be done.”**

**Paul says. let what you *do* be formed and informed  
by what you *believe*.**

**Ask a fanatic environmentalist  
why he/she is so concerned about the environment  
and their answer will most likely not include  
they feel called by God to protect the planet.**

**They think they are doing good – and indeed they are –  
- but what they are doing is *not* a response  
to their faith in God.**

**They won't use language that includes “God” or “stewardship.”**

**Ask a human rights advocate  
why he/she is so passionate about  
preserving the rights of everyone  
and their answer will refer to justice**



**rather than a calling from God.**

**Again, the work is good; the reason is not Godly.**

**To live a life that is “worthwhile” in the eyes of God  
we must allow our beliefs – our faith –  
to spill over into the deeds to which God calls us.**

**FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT:**

**Paul moves on and urges us to “be filled with the Spirit.”**

**Being “filled with the spirit”  
is not a one and done occurrence.  
It is a continuing experience.**

**It is not something that happens only upon conversion;  
or at a tent revival.**

**It is a continuing – everyday – experience.  
It is the Spirit that leads us towards God.  
It is the Spirit that calls us to a worthwhile life.**

**It is the Spirit that helps us understand the message of Christ.**

**The list Paul provides – singing, Psalms, etc.  
is simply one way that being filled with the Holy Spirit  
is manifested.**

**Being “filled with the spirit”  
means being aware of the still, small voice  
that God uses when speaking to us.**

**Being “filled with the spirit”  
means concentrating on the things of God  
more than the things of this earth.**

**One last quote from Screwtape:**

**“As long as [a person] does not convert it into action, it does not matter how much he/she thinks about this new repentance... Wallow in it... Write a book about it; that is often an excellent way of sterilizing the seeds which [God] plants in a human soul... Do anything but act. No amount of piety in [a person’s] imagination and affections will harm [the cause of evil] if [it is kept] out of his/her will... The more often he/she feels without acting, the less he/she will ever be able to act, and, in the long run, the less he will be able to feel.”**

**CONCLUSION:**

**I’ve given you a lot to think about –  
- some of it quite controversial.**

**I leave you with it to ponder.**

**As you continue to pursue a “worthwhile life,”  
remember that you do not journey along that path alone.**

**The Holy Spirit walks with you  
and helps you interpret the road signs,  
helps you avoid the potholes of sin and transgression.**

**So, lift your eyes to the heavenly horizon  
and may your journey be a blessed one.**

**PRAYER:**

**Holy God of all wisdom, just as You granted Solomon's request for an understanding mind and the knowledge to discern good from evil, we ask that You fill us with such understanding and knowledge that we may act as instruments of Your loving desire for creation, working with you to transform our selfishness into concern for others, our fear into love, our violence into peace, and our**

**brokenness into wholeness. Help us fashion our lives in to  
“worthwhile” lives. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.**