Paul describes the beauty of light and the beast, or the danger, of darkness.

1. The difficulty of darkness is living with secret sins.
2. The beauty of light is living in forgiveness and freedom.

The path to forgiveness and freedom has three steps:

- Step One: Understand that our sins really aren’t secret.
- Step Two: Identify your sin by the light.
- Step Three: Confess your sin.

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

1. Think about the last time the power went out at your home. What did you miss the most? What did you have the hardest time doing without light?

What is light’s impact on darkness? How does darkness respond to light?

Jesus calls us to live as light in our world, and once we have come to know Christ the Light of the world, we are no longer to walk in darkness. In God is the beauty of light—righteousness, goodness, and truth. But Paul warns us that once we walk in light, we have to actively work to avoid the beast of darkness, the secret sins that hurt our relationship with God.

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says and means.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 5:3-6.

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. 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.

2. Look back at Ephesians 5:1-2, from last week’s study. How do these sins in Ephesians 5:3-6 compare with what we are told in those verses?

- In Ephesians 5:1-2, which we discussed last week, Paul challenged us to follow the example of Jesus. Jesus modeled, among other things, love and sacrifice. Because of how much He loves us, He sacrificed His life for us, and that should motivate us to love others. Imitating God is a matter of character and action.

What is the common link among the sins listed in these verses? What purposes do these sins serve in our lives?

- The sins Paul listed in verses 3 and 4 are examples of self-gratifying sins through which people find value and acceptance in things other than their identities as children of God.

How does God’s standard for our bodies, minds, and speech in verses 3-4 compare or contrast with society’s standard?

How are the sins in these verses examples of idolatry (v. 5)?

- There’s no middle ground on this one: We’re either learning how to imitate Christ or we’re imitating the world around us. Idolatrous behavior limits our service to God and robs us of effort, time, and energy that we could have used to live for Him.

3. Pastor Charlie referred to the sins in Ephesians 5 as examples of the secret sins that breed in darkness. What did he say we do with our secret sins? Why does it matter?

- The reason the sins listed in Ephesians 5 are so dangerous is because they breed in secret and isolate us from God and from the encouragement and support of Christian community. But as Pastor Charlie pointed out, there is hope. The beauty of being children of light is that we can live in forgiveness and freedom. This is Paul’s point in the next set of verses.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 5:7-15.

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), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. 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. Therefore it says, “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” 15 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise.

What should characterize the lives of those living as “children of light” (v. 8)?

4. (Read Eph. 5:7-15) Aside from avoiding “unfruitful works of darkness” (v. 11), what else are we supposed to do about them? What does this accomplish?

• The comparison of light and darkness gives us the clearest distinction between the new life and old lives. Because light and darkness can’t coexist, lives redeemed by Christ’s blood and brought into the light of His truth can’t continue in the darkness of sinful lifestyles. One of the reasons self-secretive sins have such power in our lives, even after we become Christians, is because the shame and guilt keeps us captive in the darkness. Only in the light is the help, accountability, and support of godly community available to help us break bad habits and eradicate shame. As much as we’d like to think we have the power to conquer our strongholds alone, we don’t, and we’re not meant to.

What characteristics are the result of “the fruit of the light” (v. 9)? How do these compare with the fruit of the darkness in Ephesians 4:18-19?

What role does the Holy Spirit play in helping us live in the light? What role do other Christians play?

• The fruit of the light are qualities the Holy Spirit brings about in our lives to help us live as children of God. When we choose daily to live in the light of God’s truth, we put on goodness (moral excellence), righteousness (a characteristic we gain through Christ’s sacrifice for us), and truth (honesty, integrity, and trustworthiness). The fruit of the light reminds us of God’s activity in our lives while the hurt, scars, and pains of past sins remind us of our great need for God’s grace, truth, and direction.

5. According to verse 15, what’s the first step to living a life of wisdom?

• Paul’s charge for us to live in wisdom comes on the heels of the previous verses, which help us understand what living in the light looks like. Living in wisdom means taking every opportunity to glorify God and reflect the gospel to those around us. When we resolve to live in the light, we choose to pursue Christ above all worldly pursuits. Part of the reason we do that is so our lives will testify to others about God’s grace, mercy, and love.
Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

In his sermon, Pastor Charlie said that the path to forgiveness and freedom begins by understanding that your “secret sins” really aren’t secret. Do you have a hard time believing that God is ready and willing to forgive your sin and remove your guilt? Why?

6. How can we do a better job of reminding ourselves of the three steps Pastor Charlie listed, before it’s too late?

Is there a past relationship or incident that might be keeping you from experiencing the forgiveness of God? What should you do about that, following what you learned from this study and the sermon?

What role are we meant to play in each other’s lives in terms of helping each other live in the light?

DIGGING DEEPER

> READ PSALM 32 AND CONSIDER THE QUESTIONS THAT FOLLOW.

1. What is the source of blessedness or happiness in this psalm?

King David began his psalm with a beatitude expressing the joy of God’s forgiveness. David used several words to describe his failure to meet God’s holy standard. These words also may describe our own sinful situations. Transgression denotes a defiant rebellion against God’s standard—one in which sinners deliberately cross the line God has established. Sin denotes falling short, missing the target, missing God’s
righteous standard. David used the word covered to mean “covered once and for all,” that is, God would never uncover David’s sin again. Believers today need to understand this important truth. Once God forgives our sin, He forgives our sin—period. God’s Word assures us we are forgiven when we confess our sin (1 John 1:9).

2. If God already is fully aware of our sin, why do you think we still have trouble honestly confessing it?

3. Describe one specific occasion when you have experienced the mercy of God.

• Mercy as given by God is the foundation of forgiveness. It is His faithfulness and steadfast love. Throughout Scripture, God is not seen as displaying an emotion called mercy but as taking merciful action. He showed His mercy to all of us when He offered His Son, Jesus, as a sacrifice for our sins. Because of that action, God offers us salvation and forgives us of our sins when we confess them to Him, as David did in Psalm 32.