

# 2010-WALK IN THE LIGHT

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# “DARKNESS FOR LIGHT, LIGHT FOR DARKNESS”

*Jerry Moffitt*



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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Our text begins with the parable of the vineyard in Isaiah 5. This parable yields many woes. These woes are a reflection of Israel's response to all God has done to prevent distress and promote their final welfare. God did all He could have done for the vineyard—He dugged it, carried away its stones, planted it with the choicest vine, built a tower, and hewed out a winepress. Instead of the grapes that should have been produced, God got wild grapes. We are invited to judge between God and His vineyard. God's judgment was to destroy it. After all, He looked for the fruit of righteousness—and what? A cry! So His people are to go into captivity. Sheol will enlarge. Israel will go into captivity for a lack of knowledge.

As if looking back on their behavior, God pronounces woes on Israel. Each woe demonstrates the fruit of wild grapes. He condemns their materialism, their lack of knowledge, their taunts, self-deceptions, drunkenness, bribes, and their injustices. He will hiss for the tools of their punishment.

In all of these crimes, one sin is very blatant. This people calls evil “good” and good “evil.” They put darkness for light and light for darkness. They put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. They are wise enough in their own eyes to turn every vice into a virtue. They are clever to turn every filthy thing into an action as pure as the wind driven snow. Yet, God does not see it their way. They are going to find out what is about to fall on them.

Now, we are the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16). Were these things recorded just for them, or does God have the same problem with us in our day? The apostle Paul wrote in Holy Scripture the following:

Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted (1 Cor.10:6).

Now these things happened unto them by way of example; and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come (1 Cor. 10:11).

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the scriptures we might have hope (Rom. 15:4).

What do we do today in reference to fruit in God's vineyard? We will touch on quite a few things. First, notice our Scripture: "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" (Isa. 5:20). This verse begins with "Woe" (*ho-ee*). It is a form of *ho* from *haw*, in Hebrew. It carries the idea of "ah," as in expressing grief or lamentation.<sup>2</sup> The punishment for a heart so hardened as to call darkness light can only be expressed by words that intimate a loud cry. There is a hard way to learn that God, not men, sets the standards of morality. The inner character of God shows what is light and what is darkness. The character of God determines our doctrines.

### CALLING DARKNESS LIGHT

#### *The Darkness Of Denominationalism Is Not Light*

One preacher preached, against the elder's wishes, that there are Christians in all the denominations, and that we should fellowship them. The young people of his congregation liked the charisma of a certain television "Pastor" in the community. They left the church in droves to place membership there. Preaching true light may have saved them.

Every denominational church adds to God's Word. In ancient times, God said: "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish from it, that ye may keep the commandments of Jehovah your God which I command you" (Deut. 4:2).

Denominationalism is an incubator for the doctrines of demons, just right for the damnable false prophets with their plentitude of vile, cancerous, doctrines. Denominations are houses flooded with sin, operated by ministers of all evil. The apostle Paul said: "But the Spirit

saith expressly, that in later times some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons, through the hypocrisy of men that speak lies, branded in their own conscience as with a hot iron” (1 Tim. 4:1-2). We wonder who all gathered around the flame? Who used the iron? How were these able to force the hot iron on the conscience of those who gave heed to seducing spirits? But again, Paul wrote: “Take heed lest there shall be any one that maketh spoil of you through his philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Col. 2:8). Notice that the word “rudiments” (*stoicheion*) has the flavor of “first in a row of the same.” It is just like picking “a,” “b,” or “c” “of any art, science, or discipline ... fundamental principles”<sup>3</sup> of the world. These doctrines are therefore drenched with the basic, crude notions of things in opposition to God. Rip the sack of denominationalism. Out crawls lust, greed, envy, adultery, schism, precepts of men, laxity, ignorance, and such-like. Line them up and put them together and they will slither to the sun and back. Their doctrines are not from heaven, but from men (Mt. 21:25). Their “pastors” teach precepts of men (Mt. 15:7-9), with which they are impressed, being themselves numbed with carnality. Denominationalism is a darkness, in which lurks nothing good for saints.

*Teaching That Denominational Pastors Are Misguided And Sincere Is Darkness And Not Light*

Please observe:

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves. By their fruits ye shall know them. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? (Mt. 7:15-16).

For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you beforehand (Mt. 24:24-25).

For this people's heart is waxed gross, And their ears are dull of hearing, And their eyes they have closed (Mt. 13:15).

Why do ye not understand my speech? Even because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father it is your will to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and standeth not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he

is a liar, and the father thereof. But because I say the truth, ye believe me not (Jn. 8:43-45).

I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them (Acts 20:29-30).

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them that are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which ye learned: and turn away from them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Christ, but their own belly; and by their smooth and fair speech they beguile the hearts of the innocent (Rom. 16:17-18).

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, fashioning themselves into apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for even Satan fashioneth himself into an angel of light. It is no great thing therefore if his ministers also fashion themselves as ministers of righteousness, whose end shall be according to their works (2 Cor. 11:13-15).

I have dealt with false teachers for forty years. They are greedy deceivers. Are they sincere? *Sure*—as sincere as thick, fat-hearted, wolves, with sin-seared, blackened minds can be. They are hypocrites, children of the devil, and soul slayers. Their god is their belly, and my, how they do worship it. They are slick smoothies. They are evil, deceiving, howling, cheating, fakes. Other than all that, they are very sincere.

But you cringe. I am too strident and go too far. Allow me to let the Good Book describe them in God’s own words.

They “walk after the flesh in the lust of defilement” (2 Pet. 2:10). Peter continues: “[T]hese, as creatures without reason, born mere animals to be taken and destroyed” (2 Pet. 2:12). Denominationalism and false teachers are darkness.

#### *To Be Open-minded Regarding Truth Is Darkness And Not Light*

Of course we should be open-minded in a noble way (Acts 17:11). That is certainly good and is light. Noble (*eu-gen-as*) literally just means to be “well born.” Luke uses it to mean “high-minded.”<sup>4</sup> As some have a “well-born” training from birth, there are those with a high, well-born, and noble mind.

Yet, we know we cannot be good Christians and be open-minded about darkness and our regard for light. Not only that, be prepared to

be called bigoted, intolerant, and arrogant, with a superior, religio-jingoistic attitude about your own beliefs. This type of darkness wins the day by ridicule, avoidance, and fear of not being liked. But what does God say?

Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for in the same manner did their fathers to the false prophets (Lk. 6:26).

But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve in his craftiness, your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity and the purity that is toward Christ (2 Cor. 11:3).

[T]o whom we gave place in the way of subjection, no, not for an hour (Gal. 2:5).

[T]hat we may be no longer children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, in craftiness, after the wiles of error (Eph. 4:14).

No, it is not good to be thought well of by all men. The good people should like you, and evil people should hate you very much (Jn. 15:19). My brethren and I have been called “bigots,” “legalists,” “hatchet men,” “knuckleheads,” “mean-spirited,” and more. To the truly spiritually minded, to be called names is a thrill every time (Lk. 6:23). We would rather go to heaven and explain to God why we were called names, than go to heaven and try to explain why we were not. To be open-minded regarding truth is darkness, not light. Let us become children of light (Eph. 5:8).

#### *Instrumental Music Is Not Light*

Sometimes our problems arise from people who “think” in the face of God’s Word. “I think” is almost irreligious. The Christian system is not run on “I think.” “I think there is nothing wrong with instrumental music.” “I think it is just an aid to singing.” However, God said: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith Jehovah. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:8-9). God’s ways are “past tracing out” (Rom. 11:33). And, we are not to add to His word (Deut.4:2; 12:32; Pro. 30:6). Think, please, on God’s Word. Is instrumental music from heaven or from men (Mt. 21:25)? Is the precept a doctrine of God or a precept of men (Mt. 15:7-9)? Besides carnalizing the worship of God, may we notice a progression of thought?

First, is there truly a fundamental law of human thought which we might call a "law of exclusion"? If I were speaking at a lectureship and said, "Please hold up a lectureship book," many might have one and lift it up. However, if I said, speaking to Ralph at a lectureship and making good eye-contact, "Ralph, please hold up your lectureship book." Who would hold one up, Ralph or the whole audience? Ralph! "Oh, but that's not in the Bible," one might say. Oh, but the exact principle is.

First, we know we are not to add to God's Word (Deut. 4:2). Second, God used the "Law of Exclusion" in Hebrews 1:13 and in Hebrews 1:5.

But of which of the angels hath he said at any time, Sit thou on my right hand, Till I make thine enemies the footstool of thy feet? (Heb. 1:13).

For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, This day have I begotten thee? and again, I will be to him a Father, And he shall be to me a Son? (Heb. 1:5).

Which angel would be so presumptuous as to say, "I am the Son of God," or "God will be my Father? God did not say I was not." God would say, "When I expressed Who was my Son, I said not one thing about you angels. When I specified Who was my Son, I excluded any other creature!"

What if another angel was so ignorant or so apathetic that he said, "I'm going to sit on the right hand of God"? Would not God convict him saying, "When I specified who would sit on my right hand, I excluded you angels and all others"?

To specify is to exclude. Only Lazarus obeyed to "come forth" (Jn. 11:43-44). There is a law of exclusion, and it is ignored at the price of disobedience.

Now, if we read the Bible, there are two places where God specified what kind of music He wanted in worship. First we read: "... speaking one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19). Again, Colossians 3:16 says: "... teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts unto God" (Col. 3:16). There is a difference in a *capella* and symphony music. A symphony orchestra has "winds, strings, and percussion that plays symphonic works."<sup>5</sup> A "song" (*ode*) is a "lay," or "ode."<sup>6</sup> To "sing" (*ado*) is "to praise."<sup>7</sup> It is "to sing,"<sup>8</sup> or "something

sung.”<sup>9</sup> There is no symphonic tinge to any command in the New Testament. Instrumental music is a type of “care-less” darkness.

*The Direct Operation Of The Holy Spirit On The Human Spirit Is Darkness*

This one is such darkness as can be felt (Ex.10:21-22). Campbell said: “None cry for help so much as they who will not help themselves.” We hear the cry: “Everyone needs help in sanctification.” No, we do not need help doing that for which we are solely responsible. When we sin, we need to confess our sins and press on (1 Jn. 1:7-10). That is the way God said we are to be sanctified from sin once we have become a child of God. We asked our false brethren to show us what the Bible calls the “Direct Operation.” No answer. We ask for a Biblical example of it so we may study it. No reply. Biblically, we ask, what it does. We hear that it “helps” us or “enables us.” They use Romans 8:26. But we must reply that Romans 8:26 is talking of intercession. Intercession is speaking of the Spirit (or spirit) doing something *on our behalf*, not doing something *to our heart* apart from the word. The false doctrine of the “direct operation” is the salient doctrine of death. It annuls the purpose of the Word of God; denies human responsibility; annihilates free will, and ignores obedience of faith (Rom. 1:5).

Notice that the Bible is all-sufficient for matters of the heart. God said: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16-17, KJV). Scripture is a “heart changer.” It teaches, reproves, corrects, and tells us how to be righteous. We obey from the heart (Rom. 6:17), and we are sanctified. Please notice:

Jesus said: “Sanctify them in the truth: thy word is truth ... And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth (Jn. 17:17-19).

Having therefore these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2 Cor. 7:1).

[W]hereby he hath granted unto us his precious and exceeding great promises; that through these ye may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in that world by lust (2 Pet. 1:4).

And every one that hath this hope set on him purifieth himself, even as he is pure (1 Jn. 3:3).

Above is the doctrine of human responsibility and religious obedience. Scripture makes us complete unto every good work from the heart. It is truth that sanctifies (Jn. 17:17). How? The truth contains promises (2 Cor. 7:1). These promises are precious and exceedingly great. Obedience is formed by these promises, so we partake of the divine nature and are loosed from corruption of the world. Not only that, promises give hope, and by hope we purify ourselves (1 Jn. 3:3) How pure? As pure as He who will be manifested. Jesus was manifested to take away our sins (1 Jn. 3:5).

There is some damnable thing in the "direct-operation" darkness. It is the damnable doctrine of wait-for-God-to-do-it. Wait? Only, whoever believes this doctrine to the end will die in his sin. Yet, Satan will say: "Wait!"

*A Religion Of Convenience Is Darkness, Not Light*

We did not receive a social-club religion that promotes ease, accommodates a comfy relaxation, that loses our original zeal and disciplines, that affords contentment, contributes to rest, takes all the shortcuts, pleases men, avoids loss, and bows to a life free from the hassling of sacrifices and work for the Lord. Such a religion that is suited to situation, that offers freedom from hard choices, escape from sacrifices, is just snug, soft wickedness. Being handy to please, and willing to appease any doctrine or denomination, is of the devil.

When I see such a commitment to lack of denial, demands, and suffering, I know it is wrong. It is not Christianity. It is wrong, whether existing in a person or in a church. "Are you saying such is liberalism?" Yes! Such has all the constituent elements of liberalism. When the above is defended by any of my brethren, in the spirit of King Agrippa to the apostle Paul, I say: "Almost thou persuadest me to be a legalist." Please listen to God, to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to the sacred Scriptures of the Holy Spirit:

But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you (Mt. 6:33).

If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever would save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's shall save it (Mk.8:34-35).

Strive to enter in by the narrow door: for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able (Lk. 13:24).

Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 2:3).

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not vain in the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58).

A religion of ease and convenience is darkness and not light. It is not Christianity. It would be lust, desire, and pleasure that would make one even think such is Christianity.

#### *Making Pastors Out Of Preachers Is Darkness And Not Light*

It is rare, but I have had at least one incident where I preached on the very subject. An elder was quite vexed. In a meeting he told this preacher: "I know what the Bible says, but every congregation is different. We need a preacher to go out among the flock. If he finds a problem, he should report back to us."

Brethren want to make some kind of pastor out of a preacher. He must visit the hospital regularly, visit homes regularly, preach cute little sermonettes, and make Valentine's Day and Mother's Day sermons sparkle. So we hear words from preachers such as: "Keep the wives of the elders happy; especially the 'she-elders.'" "Keep the elders families well pleased." Brethren, preachers talk to preachers all the time. Usually only preachers, therefore, know some of the things that go on behind the scenes. Too, some brethren would be shocked at what misguided preachers put elders through with their whining, their demands, and even their threats. I will not speak much of it. However, I think every preacher ought to be up front with brethren. When a preacher visits you in the hospital, visits you at home, or goes to a funeral, it is because he is concerned as a Christian, as a friend, or because you are a Christian. A preacher should not do those things as a preacher. God specified what the work of a preacher is. Here, in part, is what the Bible says of an evangelist's work.

He is to know:

... foolish and ignorant questionings refuse, knowing that they gender strifes. And the Lord's servant must not strive, but be gentle towards all, apt to teach, forbearing, in meekness correcting them that oppose themselves; if peradventure God may give

them repentance unto the knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 2:23-25).

He is to preach the word urgently, "in season, out of season" (2 Tim. 4:2). He is to be sober in mind, suffer hardship, and do the work of an evangelist. He is to flee youthful lusts, regardless of how old he may be (2 Tim. 2:22). He must be able to reprove sharply (2 Tim. 4:2). A preacher should war the good warfare, and have a good conscience (1 Tim. 1:18-19). A minister of the Gospel should be nourished in the words of the faith (1 Tim. 4:6). He should command and teach (1 Tim. 4:11). He should give heed to reading, to exhortation, to teaching. In fact, he should be diligent in these things, give himself wholly to them, and let his progress be made manifest, no matter how much pressure he gets to do otherwise from members and even elders.

The work of a preacher is not to be a "men-pleaser" to the members (Gal. 1:10), and a flatterer of elders, no matter that any try to hurt him or "lord it over" their charge (1 Pet. 5:3). Let us strive in prayer and otherwise to make our preachers bold (Eph. 6:19-20). They must not be anything like the professional, weak-kneed, sissy, denominational "pastors." We do not need preachers with a backbone like a Twinkie. Such is darkness and not light.

### CALLING LIGHT DARKNESS

It is amazing how evil works. The working of Satan and evil is carefully described for those who can hear. Please scrutinize these phrases: "sheep's clothing" (Mt. 7:15-16); "snatcheth away" (Mt. 13:19); "false Christs," "false prophets," "great signs," and "lead astray" (Mt. 24:24). Also notice: "cannot hear my word," "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father it is your will to do" (Jn. 8:43-44); "he is a liar" (Jn. 8:44); "deceit" (Col. 2:8); "fair speech" (Rom. 16:18); "wiles" (Eph. 6:11); "deceitful workers" (2 Cor. 11:13); "lie in wait" (Eph. 4:14, KJV); "all deceit" (2 Thess. 2:10); "sleight" (Eph. 4:14); "god is the belly" (Phil. 3:19); "beguiled" (2 Cor. 11:3); "craftiness" (Eph. 4:14); "subtilty" (2 Cor. 11:3); "wind of doctrine" (Eph. 4:14); and "the evil day" (Eph. 6:13). Are we getting a picture of that which meets you head on, up front, and out in the open? No! Thus, we are not surprised that in our warfare light is called "darkness."

*Bible Knowledge Is Light, Not Darkness*

Our liberal brethren who deceive and are being deceived (2 Tim. 3:13), sneer at us for being locked into the Bible. They loftily claim,

with all their love, that knowing the Bible is “Theological Thumb-sucking” and “Neanderthal Theology.” Our preachers are “Bible ‘toten,’ Bible quotin’, backwoods knuckleheads,” they say. These are our “loving, wise, intellectual brethren,” we hear. Yet, we try to be like Jesus, Who said: “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes: yea, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in thy sight” (Mt. 11:25-26).

Why put a premium on ignorance, on the One Book of Christianity? It will make us complete (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Knowledge is better than choice gold (Pro. 8:11). To us, God says: “How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity [able to be seduced; silly]? And scoffers delight them in scoffing, And fools hate knowledge?” (Pro. 1:22)? Jesus said to the Saducees: “Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God” (Mt. 22:29). Did not God say: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hos. 4:6)? Solomon said: “The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge; And the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge” (Pro. 18:15). Peter said we should give diligence (2 Pet. 1:5), that in our faith we should supply knowledge. Furthermore, we are to grow in knowledge (2 Pet. 3:18). There is no friction between *love* and *doctrine*, or *love* and *knowledge*.

Please do not let these silly, proud, arrogant men huckster you. Bible knowledge is light, not darkness.

#### *Commandments Are Light And Not Darkness*

Our liberal false brethren never seem to use non-vocal communication as greatly as when talking about commandments. They smile or frown with dramatic facial contortions, and they sneer with such scorn and contempt as to turn a funeral onto an eerie back road. One could think for a moment that they are actually nauseated, or at least practicing to die, when they say the word “*commandment*.” Other words have a similar effect on them, such as “works” (Jas. 2:24) or “worthy” (Rev. 3:4), “save yourselves” (Acts 2:40), and “labor” (1 Cor. 15:58). Once they learn that these and other such words are to be used in proper context in the Bible, these Scriptures immediately become “difficult passages”—to them. They must use twisted study to produce contorted interpretations, to make these Scriptures say the exact opposite of what they clearly say. We offer the following passages for your inspection:

If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments (Jn. 14:15).

Ye are my friends, if ye do the things which I command you (Jn. 15:14).

He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him (1 Jn. 2:4).

And he that keepeth his commandments abideth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he gave us (1 Jn. 3:24).

The Bible says God's commandments are faithful (Ps. 119:86), and that we should love them above gold. We must be guided in the right path by commandments (Ps. 119:35, 86). The truth is, we are justified by works (Jas. 2:24); and, we will walk in white with Christ because we are worthy (Rev. 3:4). We do save ourselves (Acts 2:40), and we do labor, but not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58). None of this takes anything from the grace of God, the blood of Jesus, or God's plentiful mercies. Those who are not blinded by the god of this world will see that all the above are our part in salvation. God commanded these actions to be used by us for our benefit. His grace is the foundation, basis, ground, endowment, and provision of our salvation. Our works, labor, and worthiness save because they are means, instruments, and godly implements by which we reach out, grasp, and hold on to that salvation which God grants through grace. That grace centers on the very blood of Christ. So we are saved by *grace* on God's part and *obedience* on our part.

#### *Law Is Light And Is Not Darkness*

All that we said of works and grace is true of *law* and *grace*. Paul said of law: "So that the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and righteous, and good" (Rom. 7:12). Why? Paul explains: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death" (Rom. 8:1-2). How? It is fulfilled in the Son of God. The Gospel now motivates us to fulfill the ordinances and the supreme intent of the law (Rom. 8:3). So, Paul could say he was "as without law, not being without law to God, but under law to Christ" (1 Cor. 9:21). Paul said he was under law! We are also. Do you know what? We still have love.

We are under a "law of liberty" (Jas. 1:25). Hence, in obedience to the law of Christ, He who died for us, we are constrained to die to sin and live unto Him (2 Cor. 5:14). Accordingly, *commandments* and *law*

are the *light of God*, though false teachers see such as darkness and unloving legalism. The liberty of which we read is freedom from sin, not being cut loose from law, rules, and precepts. Obedience to the law of Christ forms our character into the divine image (2 Pet. 1:3-5).

*Obedience Is Light And Is Not Darkness*

All, from the atheist to the liberal, all that creep and crawl, make fun of obedience. They surmise how cold it is to do something just because you are told to do it. "One should be good for goodness sake," they say. However, to "be good for goodness sake" is still an imperative or command to obey, if they noticed. However, the "goodness" that comes through obedience to an Almighty, all loving Creator is an all-encompassing goodness they understand not.

Disobedience is nothing at which to sneeze. To mock, jeer, or demean obedience is hellishly fatal. God delivers His vengeance on them who do not obey the Gospel (2 Thess. 1:8). We purify our souls in obedience to the truth (1 Pet. 1:22). Who wants to be like Pharaoh, who said: "Who is Jehovah, that I should hearken unto his voice to let Israel go? I know not Jehovah, and moreover I will not let Israel go" (Ex. 5:2). Paul said: "... unto them that are factious, and obey not the truth ... shall be wrath and indignation" (Rom. 2:8). Jesus not only learned obedience through suffering, "he became unto all them that obey him the author of eternal salvation" (Heb. 5:9). For our sake, He "he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8). "[H]e that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him" (Jn. 3:36).

One of our fullest Scriptures is a question:

Hath Jehovah as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of Jehovah? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as idolatry and teraphim (1 Sam. 15:22-23).

Any who scoff at obedience to God, as if it is low-grade religion, would spend his time better just hanging around and feeling stupid.

*Contention Over Sound Doctrine Is Light And Not Darkness*

There is wisdom and there is sound wisdom (Pro. 2:7). There is a mind and there is a sound mind (2 Tim. 1:7). As long as there is good and evil, darkness and light (Isa. 5:20), there will be sound doctrine and teaching contrary to the sound doctrine (1 Tim. 1:10). We should

expect that there will be falsification, contention, debate, and strife. God warned us, and, if one does not like it, we must remember that we did not create religion, we just move rightly or wrongly in it. God said these words through the holy apostles and prophets:

Beloved, while I was giving all diligence to write unto you of our common salvation, I was constrained to write unto you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in privily, even they who were of old written of beforehand unto this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ (Ju. 3-4).

We are to contend earnestly for the faith (Ju. 3). Some say that such is darkness. One reason why some do not understand this is: "For when by reason of the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need again that some one teach you the rudiments of the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of solid food" (Heb. 5:12). If contending for the faith is required of us in God's Word, to oppose such, one is either ignorant of that Word or rebellious to it.

There is only "one faith" (Eph. 4:4). It is composed of "sound doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:3). The word "sound" (*hoog-ee-ah-ee-no*), means to "be well in body."<sup>10</sup> It comes from a word that means "healthy."<sup>11</sup> There are those doctrines that are contaminated, impure, and unfit for spiritual consumption. The doctrines are deadly. That being true, the war is on. Apollos, a Jew from Alexandria spake boldly in the synagogue at Ephesus. Scripture says: "[H]e helped them much that had believed through grace; for he powerfully confuted the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was the Christ" (Acts 18:27-28). So, elders are told to "convict the gainsayers" (Tit. 1:9). The "mouths" of deceivers must be stopped (Tit. 1:11). Paul explicitly said he was "set for the defence of the gospel" (Phil. 1:17). Paul, in fact, had love of the brethren in mind when he was embroiled in defense and confirmation of the Gospel (Phil. 1:7). If one wishes to follow Jesus as our Exemplar, study Him in action in Matthew 22 and 23. Contention over doctrine is light and not darkness.

*The Fear Of God Is Light And Is Not Darkness*

Yes! We have brethren who denigrate the fear of God. If you do fear God, you are thought to be a bottom-feeding Christian. It is

surmised that you are stuck in the period of the ten plagues. It is true that fear of punishment is darkness. That means you have done something sinful. The apostle John said: “There is no fear in love: but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath punishment; and he that feareth is not made perfect in love” (1 Jn. 4:18). The word for “fear,” in 1 John 4:18, is *phobos*, from which we get *phobia*. It is not *deilia* which means “fearfulness.” We are not given that fear (2 Tim. 1:7). That type of fear means you have cowardice. The fear of which we speak is not even *eulabeia*, which first meant “caution” then “reverence,” or “godly fear.” *Phobos* can stand for the emotion that causes flight, dread, terror, and being scared. However, in the moral sense, it is used in contexts that connote “reverential fear of God” and “inspired dread” of displeasing Him. Once godly fear is present, one begins to understand and to know the Almighty, and fear becomes an emotion enacted by us rather than one forced on us by God.

Thus, we have passages that read: “And if ye call on him as Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to each man's work, pass the time of your sojourning in fear” (1 Pet. 1:17). Too, Paul said: “So then, my beloved, even as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). The fear of God is the beginning of knowledge (Pro.1:7), and the beginning of wisdom (Pro. 9:10). It is light, not darkness, sweet and not bitter to have awe and fear in our thoughts of Him Who is beyond all thought.

*Love In Deed And In Truth Is Light And Not Darkness*

There is a hypocritical love that is in word, but not in deed. Such love is more powder than shot. John said: “My Little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth” (1 Jn. 3:18). We promote love. We will not let hypocritical, liberal-type love drive real love from us. We will cherish “the greatest of these”—love (1 Cor. 13:13). It is the “more excellent way” (1 Cor. 12:31). We consider many worthy traits and characteristics, yet God says: “[A]bove all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness” (Col. 3:14).

The love that we should oppose is that sentimental, mushy, effusively gushy, liberal love. If it is not to be called “demon love” or “traitor love,” we should at least follow Paul’s injunction: “Let love be without hypocrisy” (Rom. 12:9). This liberal love is the love that

disobeys God in church discipline and strictness of morals. We say: "It is 'love too much' to go to hell for it." Love "in deed" and "in truth" is light and not darkness.

### CONCLUSION

If time and space permitted we could go onward much more. We could talk about how the church is light, as is suffering and sacrifice. We could talk about small numbers and small buildings, and that the "foolishness of God" are all light. We could list more.

A person who even whispers around that "evil [is] good, and good evil; that [will] put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that [will] put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter" (Isa. 5:20) is not my friend. He or she is a danger to be watched, and a foe and adversary to be greatly opposed.

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are taken from the American Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> *The Complete Word Study Old Testament*, with *Strong's Hebrew Dictionary* (Iowa Falls, IA: AMG International, Inc., 1994), s.v. "woe."

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), s.v. "rudiments."

<sup>4</sup> William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1952), s.v. "noble."

<sup>5</sup> *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10<sup>th</sup> ed., s.v. "symphony orchestra."

<sup>6</sup> Thayer's, s.v. "ode," "song."

<sup>7</sup> W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary Of New Testament Words* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1966), s.v. "to sing."

<sup>8</sup> Arndt and Gingrich, s.v. "song."

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Vine, s.v. "sound."

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

# “THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS”

*Tommy Hicks*



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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Carefully read the following two verses. The first is from the *King James Version* of the Bible; the second is from the *Book of Mormon*.

But unto you that fear my name shall the *Sun* of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall (Mal. 4:2, KJV, emphasis added).

But unto you that fear my name, shall the *Son* of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth and grow up as calves in the stall (3 Nephi 25:2, emphasis added).

Few doubt that Mormonism’s “Master of Mistakes,” its fallacious founder, Joseph Smith, was plagiarizing Malachi 4:2 in his supposed “translation” of 3 Nephi 25:2. Anyone who compares the two verses above will readily notice Smith’s asinine blunder. Instead of the *King James Version’s* reading, “Sun of righteousness,” the mendacious Mormon miscreant says, “Son of righteousness.” Although the words “Sun” and “Son” are pronounced and sound the same, they are two different words with two different meanings.

While it is a different word with a different meaning, the word “Sun” may be used metaphorically for the “Son” (i.e., Jesus Christ, the Son of God). Acknowledging the metaphorical usage of “Son” in Malachi 4:2, Calvin commented:

The meaning then of the word sun, when metaphorically applied to Christ, is this,—that he is called a sun, because without him we cannot but wander and go astray, but that by his guidance we shall keep in the right way; and hence he says, "He who follows me walks not in darkness." (John viii. 12.)<sup>2</sup>

Deeming the Hebrew word *shemesh* ("Sun" in Mal. 4:2) to be such a metaphor, the translators of the *King James Version* and the *New King James Version* "interpreted" that "Sun" should be spelled with an "S" in the upper case. Interestingly, the *American Standard Version* (1901), *English Standard Version*, *New American Standard Version*, *New International Version*, and *Revised Standard Version* do not follow suit. Each of those translations have "sun" spelled with lower case "s" in Malachi 4:2.

### THE SUN AND SYMBOLISM

At first, immediately after "God created the heaven and the earth ... darkness was upon the face of the deep" (Gen. 1:1-2). Still on the first day of creation, "God said, Let there be light: and there was light" (Gen. 1:3). God created both, *light* and *darkness* (Isa. 45:7). On the fourth day of the creation week, God set the sun in its place (Gen. 1:14-19). Incidentally, one will not find the word "sun" in the creation passage; it does not appear until Gen. 15:12). Thus, darkness preceded light and there was light before there was a sun. All three were made by God, and all three, because of their unique and significant characteristics, came to symbolize things physical and spiritual.

Without the sun, virtually all life on Earth would be terminated. Symbiotic relationships between living things would end. Photosynthesis would cease, which means oxygen production would be stopped and there would be no conversion of carbon dioxide into the organic compounds essential for plant nourishment. Rays from the sun not only provide the warmth necessary for life on Earth, they have healing influence. For some time, the sun's contribution to vitamin D production, many of its other benefits to man's body and its influence on mood have been known. These and an untold number of other factors attributable to the sun make it a rich source for symbolism, metaphors and analogies.

Discussing how the figurative usage of the word "Sun" in Malachi 4:2 is remarkably applicable to Christ, Deane demonstrates:

What the sun is to the material world, the Messiah is to the moral world. The following blessings are suggested by the figure. 1. Light after darkness. Such is Christ to all men (John i. 4, 9), especially to his own countrymen (Luke i. 78, 79; Matt. iv. 12), but in a deeper sense to all that followed him (John viii. 12). He brought the light of truth (Isa. ix. 2), for he was himself "the

Truth." Where he rises, like the dawn, upon the benighted and bewildered traveller, he guides into the way of peace and of salvation. The light of truth shows us "the paths of righteousness" (Ps. cxliii. 8, 10). 2. Warmth after cold (Ps. xix. 6). Christ not only gives light, but life. His presence causes that spiritual warmth which is a life-giving power. He is "a quickening Spirit" (John v. 21, 25; vi. 47, etc.). There is a spiritual as well as a solar chemistry. The beams of the Sun of Righteousness both enlighten, warm, and quicken (I Cor. i. 30). 3. Health after sickness. The figure of "wings" may allude to the rays of the sun, or perhaps to the breeze which in many hot regions, especially in the zones of the trade winds, begins to blow over the land early in the morning, bringing freshness and health with it. (In the West Indies and elsewhere this morning breeze is popularly called "the doctor.") The Jews had a proverbial saying, "As the sun riseth, infirmities decrease." Christ, when in our midst, scattered around him blessings of healing, both physical and spiritual.<sup>3</sup>

Detailing the multiple analogous congruences between the phrase "Sun of righteousness" and Jesus Christ, such as Deane has done in the preceding quote, one might think no one could deny that the "Sun of righteousness" is Christ—but some do.

### SCHOLARLY VOICES OF DISSENT

Examples of dissenting voices on this point are plentiful. Deane himself *opposes* limiting the "Sun of righteousness" to being Jesus Christ, stating:

As we do not confine the prediction of "the day of the Lord" to any one day, so we do not limit the promise of "the Sun of Righteousness" to any one person. Whenever a signal manifestation of God's righteousness is displayed on behalf of his servants, it is like the rising of the sun on a dark, cold, and unhealthy land.<sup>4</sup>

Expressing his disagreement with the idea that Christ is the "Sun of righteousness," Keil conveys:

By the sun of righteousness the fathers, from Justin downwards, and nearly all the earlier commentators understand *Christ*, who is supposed to be described as the rising sun, like Jehovah in Psa 84:12 and Isa 60:19; and this view is founded upon a truth, viz., that the coming of Christ brings justice and salvation. But in the

verse before us the context does not sustain the personal view, but simply the idea that righteousness itself is regarded as a sun.<sup>5</sup>

Placing himself in the agreement with Keil, Hailey asserts:

It is certainly true that Christ came bringing to light the righteousness of God, but it is quite doubtful that the prophet here speaks of Him in person. Instead, the thought is that righteousness itself is the sun that will arise with healing in its rays or beams. This divine righteousness will be as accessible to all as is the light from the rays of the sun. Those who fear Jehovah and bask in the light of His provided righteousness will go forth from their confinement and frolic as calves turned out of a stall into the green pasture.<sup>6</sup>

Eiselen adds himself to the trio above with his explanation:

The promise of the rising of the Sun of righteousness is not a direct foreshadowing of the coming of Jesus; it refers rather to the manifestation of the divine righteousness in the day of reckoning (iii, 1), which will result in the justification of himself and in the salvation of the righteous.<sup>7</sup>

Rather than understanding that Christ is the focus of the phrase, “the Sun of righteousness,” Deane, Keil, Hailey and Eiselen (and others) see Malachi pointing to a day or time when God’s righteousness would appear.

### **GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS ESSENTIAL**

#### *Father And Son Are Righteous*

Daniel 9:44 declares: “[T]he Lord our God is righteous.” The phrase, “the righteousness of God,” is found in Romans 1:17; 3:5, 21-22; 10:3; 2 Corinthians 5:21; James 1:20; and 2 Peter 1:1. Beaming the spotlight of righteousness specifically on Jesus Christ, John exhorted: “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, *Jesus Christ the righteous*” (1 Jn. 2:1, emphasis added). Christ is “*the righteous*.” Due to the fact that He is “the righteous,” it takes little imagination to see why he might be called “the Sun of righteousness.”

#### *Vanity Of Man’s Righteousness*

Humanly devised ways (inclusive of thoughts, actions, and emotions) by which men think themselves to be made “righteous” are empty, futile and of no benefit whatsoever. During Old Testament times, Isaiah described the righteousnesses of man as “filthy rags” (Isa.

64:6). Exposing why the unconverted Jews were religious, but lost, in New Testament times, Paul lamented:

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God (Rom. 10:1-3).

#### *A Greater Righteousness*

Preaching on the mount, Jesus proclaimed: "I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5:20). Exceeding the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees may sound like an arduous task. However, it is not, really. Christ had in mind that God's righteous exceeds the righteousness of scribes and Pharisees.

Approaching the matter from a slightly different angle, two major points must be comprehended. First, the scribes and Pharisees were "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Mt. 15:9). Man's righteous comes as a result of obeying "the commandments of men"—thus, men "going about to establish their own righteousness." Second, when a man obeys God's commandments, he is made righteous. Is it any wonder then that the Psalmist said: "My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments are righteousness" (Ps. 119:172)?

#### *God's Righteousness Must Be Done*

Knowing God's commandments is not enough; one must obey God's commandments to be righteous. Peter related: "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:34-35). Surely, righteousness here is God's righteousness, not man's righteousness. Otherwise, it would not make one acceptable to God. Moreover, the denominationalists' "imputed righteousness" doctrine is false because in order for one to be righteous he must do righteousness. John warned: "Little children, let no man deceive you: *he that doeth righteousness is righteous*, even as he [God] is righteous ... *whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God*" (1 Jn. 3:7, 10). Again, undoubt-

edly, the righteousness John is contending for is God’s righteousness, not man’s righteousness.

*Where God’s Righteousness Is Revealed*

In order to do God’s righteousness, one must know where he can find it. Seekers of salvations should ask: “Where is the righteousness of God revealed?” Inspiration answers that it is revealed in the Gospel of Christ, which is “the word of righteousness” (Heb. 5:13). Paul boldly heralded:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For *therein is the righteousness of God revealed* from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith (Rom. 1:16-17, emphasis added).

Since the righteousness of God is revealed in the Gospel, and since the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation, it stands to reason that this righteousness—this righteousness which will admit one into the kingdom of heaven—is greater than the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.

Could this “righteousness” be the point of Malachi’s prophetic message? Or was he directing his readers’ attention to a *Person* he identified as the “Sun of righteousness”?

### CONTEXTUAL SETTING OF MALACHI

A post-exilic prophet, like Ezra and Nehemiah, it is thought that Malachi wrote the book bearing his name sometime between 445 and 432 B.C. Times were difficult in Judah. Derelict in their duties, the priests had compromised to a point where God’s standards were not being met in their sacrifices and teaching obligations. Religion in Judah had become little more than ceremony with the participants apathetically going through the motions. Those who were trying to live right before God were becoming disheartened and discouraged because they saw the wicked going unpunished and doing very well for themselves. Seeing no justice carried out upon the evil doers, and perceiving no benefit in trying to correctly live for and serve God, those who had not given up on God were on the verge of doing so.

Opening his work, Malachi assured his readers that God still loved Judah (Mal. 1:2-5). Next he reprimands the priest for their sinful behavior (Mal. 1:6-2:9). Then, Malachi rebukes those who have married idolaters and those who have divorced the wives of their youth

(Mal. 2:10-16). Going further with his charges, Malachi lets it be known that a day of reckoning is coming and that justice will be carried out by God (Mal. 2:17-3:5). Marking their unfaithfulness in tithing, Malachi lets the people know that if they will tithe as God has instructed them, He will bless them (Mal. 3:6-12). Turning to the subject of God's judgment upon the wicked doers of evil, Malachi gives the disgruntled ones (i.e., those who have concluded that God is not just) assurance that those who do evil will pay for the wickedness. What is more, Malachi provides a faithful affirmation that God will save those who fear Him (Mal. 3:13-4:3). Finally, Malachi exhorts his readers to remember and keep the Law of Moses (Mal. 4:4-6).

Even with only a brief sketch of the background for Malachi 4:2, the immediate context is made clearer. That immediate context, Malachi 4:1-3, says:

For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts.

Judgment day is coming and the wicked will be burned up. Nothing of them will survive, "neither root nor branch." Another outcome is in store for those who have remained faithful and reverently served God. The "Sun of righteousness" will heal them and set them free. Ultimately, the righteous will be victorious over the wicked. Narrowing his exegesis from a somewhat broader context, Ellison summarizes:

Since the disloyal element in the people exists and persists (3:13ff), there must be judgment. But the loyal have been noted (3:16) and in the day of judgment they will be preserved (3:17), so that the difference between the two parties will be clearly seen. The result of judgment will be the triumph of the righteous (4:2f).<sup>8</sup>

#### **IS THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS CHRIST?**

Laying charge to the gender of the words, some insist that Christ cannot be the Sun of righteousness. Holding this view, Lewis writes:

At least as early as the time of Coverdale (1535), the sun of righteousness was understood to be Jesus. Coverdale renders the phrase "Sonne of Righteousness." This interpretation is continued in the "Translators to the Readers" of the King James Version: "But when the fullness of time drew near, that Sunne of righteousness, the Son of God should come into the world." This is a very doubtful interpretation since Hebrew uses a feminine pronoun "her wings" to agree with sun (*shemesh*) which is a feminine noun in Hebrew.<sup>9</sup>

Coffman counters: Despite the many concurrent opinions supporting this removal of personality from this passage, such views are unacceptable. Righteousness is simply not an impersonal quality. Righteousness is one of the names of God." Pursuing the point, justifying the variable usages of gender in the text, he stresses:

The meaning of JEHOVAH-TSIDKENU is "The Lord Our Righteousness"; and let it be noted that Jeremiah used it in connection with both masculine and feminine words, Israel being masculine, Jerusalem being feminine; and, since Malachi's word for the fleshly Jews was no longer "Israel," but Jerusalem (feminine), that may account for his use of the feminine here.<sup>10</sup>

Lewis falls several centuries short in leaving the impression that Christ was thought to be the "Sun of righteousness" only about as far back as Coverdale. Why did he stop at Coverdale when he could have gone all the way back at least to Eusebius (ca. 263–339). Learning that the ancients deemed Jesus to be the "Sun of righteousness," one is inclined to agree with Coffman's conclusion: "The instinct of the ancients regarding who is meant by the Sun of Righteousness is a far better guide than the doubts of the world's current crop of scholars."<sup>11</sup>

Throughout history men have concluded that Jesus is the "Sun of righteousness." Down through history even those who will not concede that Jesus is the "Sun of righteousness" have had to admit such a determination is within the scope of reason. Surveying what men have said and written on the subject, Packard says:

There has been much difference of opinion as to whether the Sun of Righteousness was to be understood *personally of* Christ, or whether it is only a genitive of apposition—the sun, which is righteousness, or, righteousness, as a sun. The Fathers, Eusebius, Cyril, Theodoret, the early Protestant commentators, and a majority of modern ones, refer it to Christ, while the Jewish commentators, and Hengstenberg, Keil, Reinke, Koehler, refer

it to the consummation of salvation, in which Jehovah's righteousness reveals itself to the godly. Hengstenberg admits that the interpretation which refers it to Christ is well founded, though he does not find in it a distinct allusion to the person of Christ. Keil, while interpreting it, that righteousness, that is, salvation, is regarded as a sun, yet concedes that the personal view is founded upon a truth, that the coming of Christ brings righteousness. Henderson remarks: "There can be no doubt with respect to the application," and refers to the passage where Christ is called the light of men, the light of the world, a great light (Is. ix. 1), a light to the Gentiles (Is. xlix. 6), the true light, the day-spring from on high. Moore remarks: "We cannot think that the prophet here meant to predict Christ personally, or, indeed, to look at the ground of this righteousness at all." We think it safer, from the parallel passages, from exegetical tradition, and from the internal evidence, commending itself to every believing heart, and which has found expression in hymns, and in the recorded religious history of multitudes, to understand this sublime figure not of an abstract righteousness, but of a personal Christ.<sup>12</sup>

Laetsch has no hesitation in forcefully and unabashedly identifying the "Sun of righteousness" as the Christ. Presenting his findings from studying Malachi 4:2, he states categorically:

The promised Messiah is called the Sun (Gr. N.). Balaam had called Him the Star out of Jacob (Num. 24:17), Isaiah, a Great Light (Is. 9:2), the Light of the Gentiles (ch. 42: 6; 49: 6). It remained for the last prophet to present Him as the Sun, the Great Light to rule the day of the New Testament. (Cp. Gen. 1:16.) "Sun of Righteousness." He was called the Lord Our Righteousness (Jer. 23:6). In Him righteousness is personified. The Branch of David is Righteousness Incarnate, not only because of His personal righteousness (Is. 53:9b, 11b; Jer. 23:5) but also because of that vicarious righteousness procured by Him who fulfilled the Law as our Substitute (Gal. 4: 4 f.).<sup>13</sup>

### CONCLUSION

Truer words were never spoken than Coffman's assessment: "The Sun of Righteousness" here in Malachi fits Jesus Christ alone, and no other. No idiosyncrasy of Hebrew grammar can hide this fact which is as clear as the sun at perihelion!"<sup>14</sup> At creation there was darkness and no life before there was light and life. Before Jesus came, this old world was hopelessly lost in the dismal, pitch-black darkness of sin—there

was no life, spiritual life. The "Sun of righteousness" is "the light of the world" (Jn. 8:12; 9:5). Knowing that the world was dying in sin and that it was in need of a physician (Mk. 2:17), He came with healing in His wings and made the blessed announcement: "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (Jn. 10:10). Without the "Sun of righteousness," there would be no life!

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are taken from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, "Zechariah and Malachi" (Edinburgh, UK: Calvin Translation Society, 1849), 5:618.

<sup>3</sup> H.D.M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, *The Pulpit Commentary*, "Malachi" (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963), 62-63.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>5</sup> Keil and Delitzsch *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Malachi 4:2, E-Sword, Version 7.9.8.

<sup>6</sup> Homer Hailey, *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1972), 424.

<sup>7</sup> Frederick Carl Eiselen, *Commentary on the Old Testament, The Minor Prophets*, "Malachi" (New York, NY: Eaton and Mains, 1907), 9:735.

<sup>8</sup> H.L. Ellison, *The Old Testament Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), 136.

<sup>9</sup> Jack P. Lewis, *The Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), 87.

<sup>10</sup> James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1983), 4:296-297.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 294.

<sup>12</sup> Johann Peter Lange and Philip Schaff, *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Minor Prophets*, "Malachi" (New York, NY: Scribner, Armstrong and Co., 1874), 16:26.

<sup>13</sup> Theo. Laetsch, *The Minor Prophets* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1965) 544.

<sup>14</sup> Coffman, 296.

# **“ONE THAT DOETH EVIL HATETH THE LIGHT”**

*Chuck Northrop*



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## **INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>**

By night a “believing unbeliever” came to Jesus. He was a ruler of the Jews, a member of the Sanhedrin, and a wealthy Pharisee. He was a “believing unbeliever” because he was among those who “believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did” (Jn. 2:23), but he was an unbeliever because he did not come to Jesus in obedience. Nicodemus was this “believing unbeliever’s” name. He came to Jesus and stated: “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him” (Jn. 3:2).

Following this statement, Jesus gave a beautiful discourse on the necessity of the new birth (vv. 3-13), and God’s purpose in sending His Son into the world (vv. 14-21). Any interpretation of this text must be understood in this light. This discourse served a threefold purpose.

First, like many of those who saw the miracles of Jesus and believed in His name, Nicodemus found it difficult to become a disciple of the Lord. There may have been any number of reasons for this difficulty. It may have been a misunderstanding of the commandments of Christ. Obviously, Jesus’ teaching was difficult for Nicodemus. During this discourse, twice he asked, “How?”—“How can a man be born when he is old?” (v. 4), and “How can these things be?” (v. 9). Because of Jesus’ response, Nicodemus should have understood. However, it is always difficult for a materialistically-minded person to understand spiritual concepts. Also, it may have been fear of his fellow Jews. Later, because the Jews sought to kill Jesus, many would not

speak of Him openly "for fear of the Jews" (Jn. 7:13). Nicodemus may have been of this same mind-set. He may have not been in fear of his life, but it is likely he may have been in fear for his status among the Jews, his rank among the Jewish leadership, or for his wealth. Additionally, it is obvious that many of the things Jesus taught were difficult to accept even by His own followers. During His discourse on marriage and divorce, Jesus said: "All men cannot receive this saying" (Mt. 19:11). In John 6, Jesus taught that He descended from the Father and would ascend up to Him. Because of this difficult teaching, "many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him" (Jn. 6:66). Nicodemus may have been much like them.

A second purpose of Jesus' discourse with Nicodemus was to relieve some possible prejudices the Jews had toward the Gentile world. Jesus' reference to that "which is born of the flesh is flesh" (Jn. 3:6) concerned fleshly birth into Judaism. However, Nicodemus needed to be born of the Spirit in order to become Jesus' disciple. This purpose can also be easily seen in the second part of His discourse. Jesus said: "For God so loved the world" (Jn. 3:16). God's love extended far beyond the Jewish world. Many of the Jews in that day thought the Messiah would come to save them from the Gentile nations. They saw the Messiah as a military leader who would bring condemnation upon the Greek world. However, "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved" (Jn. 3:17).

A third purpose of this discourse was to encourage obedience. For this reason, Jesus contrasted fleshly birth and spiritual birth (v. 6), the reward of belief and the reward of unbelief (vv. 15-16), and those who "doeth evil" and those who "doeth truth" (vv. 20-21). Like all men everywhere, Nicodemus needed to be encouraged to do truth.

Have you ever considered which passage of the Bible is the most memorized? According to some, John 3:16 is second to only to Psalm 23. Speaking to Nicodemus, Jesus said: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." God is characterized by love, which is expressed by words and by actions. It is expressed in the words of the Scriptures, and it is expressed in the action of the giving of His Son. Who or what is the world which God loves? The world is the whole-world of humanity. It is not just the Jewish world, nor is it the world of the elect. God desires all men to be saved. Paul expressed

this in 1 Timothy 2:4, speaking of God: “Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” Peter wrote: “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). Jesus “is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 Jn. 2:2). Because of God’s love for humanity, He gave His only begotten Son. The word “gave” emphasizes the idea of sacrifice.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of giving His Son is for men not to perish, but rather to have everlasting life.

John 3:17 adds: “For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.” The word “sent” is parallel with “gave” in the previous verse. This is the verb form of our word “apostle.” An apostle was a person sent out on a mission. Christ’s mission into the world was not to condemn the world but to save the world. This does not in any way take away from the fact that He will one day judge the world, “for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ” (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10). God has “appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained” (Acts 17:31). The judgment of “the quick and the dead” (2 Tim. 4:1) is the ultimate consequence of the rejection of God’s Son, but His purpose in coming to this world of woe is man’s salvation—“that the world through him might be saved.” “Saved” is parallel with not perish and everlasting life of verse 16.

There are several thoughts included in the term “salvation.” Literally, the term means “deliverance or preservation.”<sup>3</sup> In addition, it can mean to “rescue” or bring to “safety (physical or morally).”<sup>4</sup> Included in this term is the idea of restoration which means “back again” or “to set in order,” and is used in Acts 3:21.<sup>5</sup> When salvation or deliverance is accomplished, a person is restored unto the Father.

Another term associated with salvation is “justification.” Literally, this is “the act of pronouncing righteous, justification, acquittal.” Further, it is “the establishment of a person as just by acquittal from guilt.”<sup>6</sup> When a person inherits salvation, he or she is acquitted of the consequences of his or her sins. Among the consequences is death. Paul wrote: “For the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23a). *Death* in this passage is eternal separation from God. With salvation and the acquittal of the death sentence, the Christian has “eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” which is “the gift of God” (Rom. 6:23b).

Also associated with salvation is the term "regeneration." This term is only used twice in the New Testament (Mt. 19:28; Tit. 3:5). In Titus 3:5. Paul wrote: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." Regeneration is the state or act of rebirth or spiritual renovation.<sup>7</sup> Literally, it comes from two words, "again" and "genesis," and means again beginning or again birth.<sup>8</sup> The "washing of regeneration" is the new birth which is baptism for the remission of sins. In Jesus' discourse with Nicodemus, Jesus explained the new birth of water and Spirit without which a person cannot see the kingdom of God (Jn. 3:3-5). Baptism is the "washing of regeneration" for it has the promise of remission of sins (Acts 2:38), it is the new birth (Rom. 6:4), it places a person into Christ (Gal. 3:26-27), and by it a person is added to the number of the saved, the church (Acts 2:41; 1 Cor. 12:13). Notice further in the passages just cited that the washing of regeneration or baptism is absolutely necessary. Without it, a person cannot be saved, and by it a person comes into contact with the precious redemptive blood of Jesus.

In addition, the term sanctification is connected with "salvation." The term means holiness and is associated with such terms as "hallowed," "sanctify," and "saint." It refers to making a person or thing set apart or consecrated for God which is the opposite of being common or profane.<sup>9</sup> When a person is saved, he or she is set apart for service unto God (Eph. 2:10), and because of such, every Christian "should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour" (1 Thess. 4:4). In other words, Christians should strive to live in purity.

"Redemption" is the final term that we will consider in connection with salvation. Redemption means "to redeem by paying the price."<sup>10</sup> A ransom is the price paid for redemption.<sup>11</sup> To redeem means "to buy."<sup>12</sup> This word was commonly used "as the purchase-money in freeing slaves."<sup>13</sup> Thus, a ransom price was paid to redeem a slave from bondage. Jesus paid the price for our redemption. He came "to give his life a ransom for many" (Mt. 20:28). By paying the ransom price, He released us from the bondage of sin.

Though there are many other words associated with salvation, these will suffice for our purpose. Each of these emphasizes a certain aspect of godly living. Also, each one should be descriptive of the lives of Christians.

John's record of the discourse between Jesus and Nicodemus continues with Jesus declaring: "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (Jn. 3:18). "He that believeth" literally means "he that keeps on believing."<sup>14</sup> A person who keeps on believing in Jesus is not under condemnation. Paul wrote: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:1). Rather than condemnation, those who keep on believing, and are in Christ, have salvation. As in John 3:16, "belief" is not used in a narrow sense of mental assent or knowledge of facts. Such belief is condemned as the belief of devils. James wrote: "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble" (Jas. 2:19). The devils have mental assent and knowledge of facts. They understand Who the Godhead is, and they understand God's will, but their belief does not lead them to act upon their faith. They have a dead faith because it is without works of obedience (Jas. 2:20).

The type of faith Jesus called upon Nicodemus and all men to have is an obedient belief—a faith that leads men to obey God in all things. This is a living faith. It is the faith of Abraham who believed and obeyed God by leaving his country, his kinsmen, and his father's house and going to a place that God would show him (Gen. 12:1). This is the faith of David who believed God would protect him when he went against the Philistine giant Goliath. This is the faith of Paul who labored abundantly in unknown lands and with unknown peoples of other nations. And, this is the faith of those men and women recorded in the great hall of faith, Hebrews 11. In each example in this great faith chapter, each individual believed and acted upon his or her faith. Thus, Jesus does not call us to the mere knowledge (the belief of devils), but calls upon us to act in faith. When this is done, we are not under condemnation but have salvation.

In contrast to believers, the person who does not believe is condemned already. This is not Calvinistic predestination which teaches that God has chosen some individuals to be lost and others to be saved. In no way is Jesus teaching that certain individuals are predestined to condemnation. If that was the case, then it would be contrary to other clear passages of Scripture. By inspiration of God, Paul wrote: "Who [God] will have all men to be saved, and to come

unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). If God chose certain individuals to be lost, then how could Paul write that His will is for “all men to be saved”? Peter, also by inspiration, wrote: “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). Again, if God chose certain individuals to be lost, then how could Peter write that God is “not willing that any should perish”? If God chose even a single person to be lost, then He does not desire all men to be saved. Such is totally against God’s character and will.

What then is Jesus teaching? Jesus taught Nicodemus that *unbelief* is already condemned. God has always condemned unbelief. He condemned Adam and Eve when they demonstrated their unbelief by eating the forbidden fruit. He condemned the people of Israel for their unbelief in the wilderness between Egypt and the promised land. Today, He condemns men for their unbelief in not following His will, which He reveals through Jesus Christ. It is in that same sense only that those who continue in unbelief are already condemned.

With the context briefly explained, we come to our text, John 3:19-21, which says:

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

#### STATEMENT OF THESIS

Like many passages recorded by various Biblical writers, Jesus begins with a thesis and then builds upon it. The actual statement of thesis is: “[L]ight is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light.” Guy N. Woods pointed out: “The occasion of the ‘judgment’ (condemnation) of evil men was the coming of Christ to the world to lead them from darkness to light ...”<sup>15</sup> Please do not miss the point, Christ’s coming did not bring condemnation. Condemnation was already in the world before Christ came. Adam and Eve were in sin while in the garden of Eden long before Jesus came into this world of woe. The children of Israel were in sin during the wilderness wanderings and in much of their history. Remember, God punished northern Israel for their sins by carrying them off into Assyrian captivity. Less

than a century and a half later, He carried Judah off into Babylonian captivity because they followed in Israel's sins. Sin was alive and well long before Jesus offered pardon and redemption. The very fact that Jesus offers salvation indicates the need for the forgiveness of sins and that condemnation was already a fact.

"Condemnation" can be translated "judgment." A.T. Robertson pointed out: "It is more precisely the process of judging rather than the result of judgment."<sup>16</sup> By rejecting the salvation God offers through Jesus, God brings judgment into the world. Thus, the reason why men are punished is because men love darkness rather than light.

Light is often used to represent several ideas. In part, it is used to represent Jesus. Jesus is the true light of the world. He said: "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (Jn. 8:12). In John 1:4, John recorded: "In him was life; and the life was the light of men." Later, in the same context, we are taught that John the baptizer bore witness of the Light, Jesus, "the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (Jn. 1:8-9).

The true disciples of Christ are also represented as light. After the Beatitudes, in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught His disciples: "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid" (Mt. 5:14). To be sure, disciples are not the true light, but they reflect the light of Jesus. In this sense, light represents influence. Jesus has an obvious influence over His disciples, and the disciples should have an influence over those of the world. Sadly, however, it is often the other way around. The world seems to have a greater influence over Christians than Christians have over those of the world.

In addition, light represents doctrine, teaching, or instruction. In 2 Corinthians 4:4 Paul wrote: "In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." Again, the idea is influence. All men should be influenced by the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for it will light their path of life and lead men to an eternal reward.

What are some basic characteristics of light? The most basic of all the characteristics of light is that light, *lights*. Think about this, what good is light if it does not light? As Jesus said, men do not light a candle and put it under a bushel. It is placed on a candlestick in order for the light to give off light to all that are in the house (Mt. 5:15). The

light that does not give light is like salt that has lost its savor. It is good for nothing. A lightless light is like a Christian who is one in name only. He has the appearance of being a Christian, but none of the qualities. Such individuals are the most pathetic in all the world because they get no pleasure in their worldliness, nor do they get any pleasure from being in Christ. The fact of the matter is they are as useless as lightless lights to the Lord's cause.

Another characteristic of light is it is self-evident and obvious. Again, Jesus taught: "A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid" (Mt. 5:14). True Christianity cannot be hidden. However, it ought to be obvious to all that some Christians try to hide the obvious. If light does not shine, it is not doing what it was meant to do. As much as some Christians try, light cannot shine in certain places and while doing certain activities. A Christian's light cannot shine in the liquor store while he is buying liquor. It cannot shine in the gambling casinos while a Christian is playing the games. It cannot shine in our neighborhoods while Christians are fussing with each other, with neighbors, with the little league coach, or with business men. It cannot shine while Christians are wearing immodest apparel. The bottom line is this: A Christian is not a shining light while he is doing any evil deed.

Light illuminates and banishes darkness. When we walk into a dark room and turn on the light, darkness is banished. Often times the light brings a feeling of security and comfort. Paul wrote: "But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light" (Eph. 5:13). Because light illuminates and banishes darkness, it reveals what was once hidden. Yea, even the things that do not want to be revealed. This was Jesus' point in the Parable of the Lost Coin. Jesus taught:

Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost (Lk. 15:8-9).

Because of her desire to find her lost coin, this woman searched diligently with light which expelled the darkness. Christianity makes a difference. It banishes the darkness of sin, superstitions, and ignorance. Truth drives out falsehoods.

Light burns sacrificially. Three things were needed to make a lamp in the first century: a vessel, a wick, and oil. Take away any one of

these, and a person could not have a lighted lamp. None of these three items were expendable. However, two of the three are self-sacrificing. The wick and oil burns away as the lamp gives off its light. Similarly, saints must give of themselves in order for their light to properly burn. There is no place within the church for a selfish, self-absorbed, or self-reliant disciple who will not let his light burn because he is afraid of wearing out his lamp, burning up his wick, and using up his oil.

Light guides and warns of dangers. The pillar of fire over the tabernacle guided the nation of Israel through the wilderness (Ex. 13:21). The star over Bethlehem guided the wise men from the east to the Christ Child (Mt. 2:9). In much the same way, Christ, the Gospel, and Christians guide men to righteousness and to God, the Father. Also, all three warn of various perils along the way, such as false teachers, false doctrine, and the danger of being lost.

The next statement in our text is "... men loved darkness rather than light." One of the most obvious assessments that can be made from this text is that light and darkness stand in absolute contrast with each other. If there is light, then darkness is dispelled, but if there is darkness, then light is diminished. Just as light represents Christ, the Gospel, and Christians, darkness must represent something. What does darkness represent?

Since light and darkness are contrasted, and light in part represents Christ, then darkness must be the opposite of Christ. Darkness cannot be any type of reflection upon Deity. John wrote: "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 Jn. 1:5). The essence of this verse is that God is only light, and that there is absolutely no darkness at all in Him. So, darkness is at enmity with God. It is all that is opposed to the Divine Nature. Satan and his forces would most certainly fit into this category. Within the context of the preparations a soldier of Christ must make in order to face his enemies, Paul wrote: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12). Who are "the rulers of the darkness of this world"? Though commentators are not agreed, it must, at the very least, include Satan and his evil forces. They are darkness, and they lead men to and in darkness.

Since darkness stands in opposition to God, then the false gods of idolatry and heathenism must be represented by darkness. The person

who follows an idol god is in darkness. To think that a carved image of wood, or that a molded image of silver or gold is a god shows ignorance and is in no way rational. To follow such, a person would have to be blinded to reality. Yet, idolatry was practiced in the past and continues to be practiced today. Some may respond and say: “Yes, but it takes place in some far away place.” Does it? I think not. Paul wrote, “... and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col. 3:5). Modern-day man may be more sophisticated than to have carved images, but the idol which is the “almighty dollar” is worshiped and served by myriads of men today.

Anything that is worshiped or prioritized above God is darkness. In many circles, it is acceptable to speak of the idolatry of covetousness, but a person dare not speak of their favorite sport, hunting or fishing, TV or movies, and the such like—hobbies and the pass-time thrills of people today. However, the fact remains, if what you do for entertainment takes precedence over God, then it is darkness.

Just as light represents the Divine instructions of the Gospel, darkness represents ignorance, error, and superstitions. Darkness is the opposite of truth. When men “heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Tim. 4:3-4), they love darkness more than light. When men love error more than truth, they love darkness more than light. When men love the commandments of men and lay aside the commandments of God, they love darkness more than light.

Just as light represents the true disciples of Jesus, darkness represents those who will not follow God. Christians have been “delivered ... from the power of darkness,” and “translated ... into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Col. 1:13). Though Christians walked in darkness when they were of the world, they no longer walk in such a way. To the Corinthian Christians, Paul wrote:

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

Notice the contrast between what they *were* and what they *are*. They walked in the course of this world, but now they are walking in sanctification and justification. Thus, walking in darkness is to walk in sin, wickedness, and error.

### REASON FOR THESIS

In the discourse between Jesus and Nicodemus (Jn. 3:19-21), Jesus gave a reason for the statement of thesis. He said: “[B]ecause their deeds were evil.” As needed and lovely as light is, men love darkness. Why? Jesus said: “[B]ecause their deeds were evil.” As wonderful and beautiful as light is, why would anyone want to walk in darkness? “[B]ecause their deeds were evil.”

When light comes, it exposes what was in darkness. Imagine yourself walking into a dark room for the first time, a room you have never entered before. Since it is dark, you do not know who or what is there. You do not know what is about to happen. Whatever is there, whether good or bad, is exposed when light enters the room. In thinking about this, a person would think that since light exposes whatever is there, it would be good even if evil was exposed. If, when the light comes on, and evil is exposed, then we can protect ourselves from the evil, or maybe even fight off the evil. But not so! Why? “[B]ecause their deeds were evil.” Those in sin do not like to be exposed, and therefore they avoid light.

Why do men not want their evil actions exposed? Probably one of the primary reasons is because of pride. Most of us do not want to be wrong, and pride keeps us from admitting when we are wrong. As sad as it may seem, many people would rather live in sin than to admit that they are wrong. How often have you been in a discussion and heard someone defending their sin, wickedness, or error against an obvious truth. Have you heard someone defend their “belief only” doctrine when the Bible is so clear on the matter? James wrote: “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (Jas. 2:24). Or, what about the “once saved, always saved” doctrine when Paul plainly warned: “Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:4)? How much clearer could these passages be? Yet, numerous individuals will not give up the errors of “salvation by faith only” and “once saved, always saved.” Why? Pride must be at least one factor.

Another reason why men do not want their evil actions exposed is because it brings consequences to their actions. The speeder does not want to get caught because of the fine. The murderer does not want to be apprehended because of the prison sentence. The liar does not want to be exposed because of the disgrace. For such reasons as these, the consequences of a person's wrong doing are often a deterrent to his wanting his evil exposed. As all of us know, if people will think before acting, they will save themselves from all kinds of heartache and pain. In Ephesians 5:11, Paul wrote: "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." Reproof is one consequence of walking in darkness. Most of us do not want to be reprovved. Therefore, we do not want our evil actions exposed.

An additional reason why men do not want their evil actions exposed is because it demands change. Change is most difficult for most of us, but we realize its necessity. Rather than repenting, many people would rather continue in sin. Rather than making necessary reformation of character, many people would rather maintain their own flawed traits. Rather than moral transformation, many people would rather proceed downward in their degradation. Change takes effort and is difficult, but it is also necessary for growth.

What are some examples of areas in which men do not want their deeds exposed? Probably one of the most prominent is in the area of science. Today's science is mostly propagated and taught by atheists and evolutionists. However, creation demands a Creator. The psalmist declared: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork" (Ps. 19:1). Contrary to the concept that design demands a designer, many scientists today want to deny the existence of God. Probably, one of the most fundamental reasons why they want to do so is because they do not want to be accountable to God. Nonetheless, many of them will get extremely upset when their evolutionary and atheistic ways are exposed.

Another prominent area that may be a little closer to home, as far as the Lord's church is concerned, is the subject of marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Jesus was very clear on the topic. He said: "I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery" (Mt. 19:9). Though Jesus' teaching is plenary and precise, many Christians hold views which conflict and/or contradict His doctrine. Usually the reason they hold to

such views is because one of their loved ones, a friend, or they themselves are in an adulterous relationship—“because their deeds were evil.”

Maybe even still closer to home are the various denominational doctrines that members of the Lord’s church compromise on because of loved ones and/or friends who are (or were) members of a particular denominational group. Sadly, these may even compromise when it comes to fundamental doctrines having to do with how one is saved. Speaking to many of them, you would go away thinking they have never read their Bibles and/or that they were never really converted. Why have they gone astray? Why have they denied such fundamental teaching? “Because their deeds were evil.”

### EXPOSITION OF THESIS

In John 3:20-21, Jesus gave Nicodemus an exposition of His thesis. He said: “For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.” In these verses, Jesus expounds upon His statement of thesis and His reason for His thesis. To be exact, John 3:20-21 present a classic example of antithetic parallelism. This “is that in which lines and sentences are made to oppose each other.”<sup>17</sup> In our text, verse 20 is the opposite of verse 21, yet the two verses are parallel in thought. Also, in these two verses there are four antithetic parallel thoughts. Consider each of them.

“For every one that doeth evil” is parallel with, but opposite to, “But he that doeth truth.” Though not apparent in the English, the Greek words translated “doeth” in each phrase are not the same. In the first statement, Greek words translated “doeth” means “commit” or “practice.” It means to “perform repeatedly or habitually.”<sup>18</sup> In the second statement, Greek words translated “doeth” means to make or to abide.<sup>19</sup> “[E]very one that doeth evil” is the person who walks in darkness and does not want the light to interfere with him.<sup>20</sup> “[H]e that doeth truth” is the person who abides in truth by obedience to it.

Notice the result of doing evil and doing good are also antithetic parallelism. “[H]ateth the light” is the antithesis of “cometh to the light.” The evil doer hates exposure to light because of the reasons mentioned earlier. However the truth doer is not burdened when his deeds are exposed. In fact, he desires his light to “shine before men,”

not to glory in himself or to bring glory to himself, but that others may see his good works, and glorify the Father which is in heaven (Mt. 5:16).

Additional results of practicing evil and abiding in truth are: “neither cometh to the light” and “that his deeds may be made manifest,” respectively. Because of the evil doer’s deeds, he does not choose, he even rejects, the light of the Gospel. Evil doers prefer error over truth. In contrast to that, the truth doer’s deeds are “made manifest,” that is, they are made known or “made clear or plain.”<sup>21</sup> Again, those who abide in truth want their deeds known, not to bring upon themselves any type of self-recognition, but to glorify God (Mt. 5:16).

The antithesis of the last statement, “lest his deeds should be reproved,” is “that they are wrought in God.” The reason for the rejection of light by the person who practices evil is that he does not want his deeds to be reproved. “Reprove” signifies to convict or refute.<sup>22</sup> “In earlier classical Greek it signifies to disgrace or put to shame.”<sup>23</sup> The light of the Gospel convicts the evil doer of sin (and the consequence of his sin), and for this reason, he hates the light and does not want to come to the light. But, those who do truth “have no fear of the light because they know that the light will reflect the true character of their conduct and this they are not afraid for anybody to see.”<sup>24</sup> “[W]rought in God” means “done in God” (NKJV) or worked in God. In other words, they are done in accordance with the will of God and are God approved.

### CONCLUSION

Within the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Mt. 7:13-14). Applying that point to what Jesus did with Nicodemus, Jesus gave Nicodemus the choice between the two roads one may travel in life—the way of the wicked and the way of truth. Today, we are given the same choices. Jesus has revealed the consequences of each. Now it is up to us to decide. We do not know which way Nicodemus chose. We hope he chose the right path, but whether he did or not, we are confident he knew and now knows the right way. The question is no longer for him. It is now for our consideration. Which way will you choose?

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are taken from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.
- <sup>2</sup> Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, n.d.) s.v. “gave.”
- <sup>3</sup> W.E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of Old Testament and New Testament Words* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), 339-340.
- <sup>4</sup> James Strong, *Strong’s Talking Greek & Hebrew Dictionary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), s.v. “salvation.”
- <sup>5</sup> Vine.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, s.v. “justification.”
- <sup>7</sup> Strong, s.v. “regeneration.”
- <sup>8</sup> Vine, s.v. “regeneration.”
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, s.v. “sanctification.”
- <sup>10</sup> Vincent, s.v. “redemption.”
- <sup>11</sup> Strong, s.v. “redemption.”
- <sup>12</sup> Vine, s.v. “redeem.”
- <sup>13</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), s.v. “redeem,” 327.
- <sup>14</sup> Guy N. Woods, *A Commentary on The Gospel According to John* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company, 1981), 68.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>16</sup> Robertson.
- <sup>17</sup> D.R. Dungan, *Hermeneutics* (Delight, AR: Gospel Light Pub. Co., n.d.), 337.
- <sup>18</sup> Strong, s.v. “doeth.”
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>20</sup> Max Patterson, *An Outline Commentary on the Book of John* (Neosho, MO: published by author, n.d.), 39.
- <sup>21</sup> Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament, Luke-John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976), 208.
- <sup>22</sup> Vine, s.v. “reprove.”
- <sup>23</sup> Vincent, s.v. “reprove.”
- <sup>24</sup> Woods, 69.

# “A LIGHT OF THEM WHICH ARE IN DARKNESS”

*Jon McCormack*



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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

“Consistency, thou art a jewel.” Though not a direct quote from any standard author, it is an expression that has been popular since at least the fourteenth century. Likewise, it is a fitting quote to describe the assigned text. Inspiration reads:

Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law. Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? (Rom. 2:17-23).

If one were to attempt to sum up this text, along with its preceding verses, he might use the phrase, “Practice what you preach.” This is a valuable lesson that is greatly needed in the world, and most certainly the Lord's church, today. Too often, one can be a witness of the hypocritical actions of those who claim to be followers of our Creator. The Jews of Paul's time were just such a breed. Though the focus of the writing is the duplicity of the Jewish people, members of the church

today can find great value in the study of Romans 2:17-23. The merit of understanding the necessity of practicing what we teach is truly great, and it will assist us in our journey to heaven.

### **THE CHOICE TO TEACH**

We must be careful regarding “why” we choose to be teachers of God’s Truth. James warns: “My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation” (Jas. 3:1). James is not encouraging Christians to abstain from being teachers. Rather, he wants his readers to consider the weight that comes with the position. If James was discouraging members of the church relative to becoming teachers, he would be contradicting the writer of Hebrews who chastised some brethren for not maturing into teachers (Heb. 5:12). The need for teachers of righteousness is great. Paul writes: “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Rom. 10:14). We must continue to encourage brethren to study so that they will one day reach sufficient spiritual maturity and be capable of teaching the unchanging Truth of God’s Word.

Even with the need for teachers being great, we must cautiously enter into such a position knowing that what we teach to others, we must apply to ourselves. Before entering into this noble endeavor, one must prayerfully search himself to see if he is ready for such a position. We are in desperate need of men and women in the Lord’s kingdom who will take up the fine mantle of teaching, men and women who will stand in the gap and fill the places vacated by the deceased saints who once upheld the Old Jerusalem Gospel.

### **THE DANGER OF PRIDE IN TEACHING**

The problem with the Jews of Paul’s day was that they prided themselves in their positions as teachers. Many were teachers simply for the prestige that it brought them. Describing the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus declared:

But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi (Mt. 23:5-7).

Like the prideful Jews of that time, we can fall into the same trap today. If one's motives involve anything other than pleasing God and saving souls, then said person needs to reevaluate his desire to become a teacher. The Jews described above desired to be recognized as the ones having educational authority. Individuals in the church can find themselves facing the same temptation—and some yield to it.

### **THE COST OF NOT PRACTICING WHAT WE PREACH**

Our Savior teaches us to count the cost before we enter into any endeavor (Lk. 14:27-33). This rule does not apply only to righteous endeavors. What a wonderful world we would have if everyone considered the consequences of their actions. When we fail to obey the commands that we instruct others to obey, we not only affect our souls, we most certainly affect the souls of others. Preachers of the Old Jerusalem Gospel and all Christians are given the mandate that we must practice what we preach.

The world about us is just waiting to show the folly of the New Testament church. We must not give the worldly unbelieving skeptics any excuse to persecute or despise the church of the Firstborn. Of course, one can see that the preaching of any false doctrine is not tolerated by our Creator (1 Tim. 1:3). Many will find themselves in everlasting torment because of the false doctrines they have taught and/or believed. However, it is beneficial for us to understand that even those who proclaim the whole council of God can suffer punishment in hell if they fail to comply with what they teach.

Peter serves as an example of this possibility because of his sin at Antioch. Paul "withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed" (Gal. 2:11). Peter was guilty of being a respecter of persons. He had withdrawn himself from the Gentiles in the presence of the Jews. This action would certainly be wrong in and of itself, but it gains a deeper perversion when compared with what Peter had previously taught others. In teaching Cornelius and his companions, Peter said: "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:34-35).

After the conversion of the Gentile household of Cornelius, and upon his return to Jerusalem, Peter had to calm the brethren of Judea by showing them the folly of being a respecter of persons. He rhetorically asked them: "[W]hat was I, that I could withstand God?" (Acts 11:17).

This righteous teaching of Peter quieted the brethren and erased their ignorance on the subject. Luke's record continues: "When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18). Later, at Antioch, Peter opted to not practice what he had preached. His previous actions and teachings on the subject did not cover the sin that he committed. Likewise, our teachings against sin will not cloak our sins. If we do not practice what we preach, what we do practice is hypocrisy.

### THE PHARISAISM OF THE JEWS

Of the practitioners of hypocrisy recorded in the Bible, none are more infamous than the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day. They believed themselves to be the religious elite. Their pride and arrogance had corrupted them so much that they were not seeing to it that God's laws were followed. Instead, they were enforcing the laws they had contrived themselves. In His "Sermon on the Mount," Jesus preached: "[E]xcept your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5:20). Our Savior, in that sermon, went on to correct many of the laws fabricated by the scribes and Pharisees. Throughout that sermon, Jesus stated: "Ye have heard that it was said" (Mt. 5:21, 27, 33, 38, 43). Christ was certainly pointing out the defects in the "righteousness" of the scribes and Pharisees.

Matthew 15 contains the record of the Pharisees confronting Jesus because His disciples did not wash their hands before they ate. Their own words confirmed their unrighteousness when they asked Jesus why his disciples transgress *the traditions of the elders*. Note, they did not ask why His disciples transgressed the commands of God. Pharisaism holds the traditions of men to be on a higher plane than the commands of God. Pointing out their error and their hypocrisy, Jesus responded to the Pharisees question with the scolding rebuke:

Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you,

saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men (Mt. 15:3-9).

The scribes and Pharisees could have been the “poster children” for those who do not practice what they preach. They wanted to pass themselves off as being righteous while, at the same time, refusing to obey the commandment to honor their fathers and their mothers. Again, in connection with the actions and inactions of the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus told His disciples: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not” (Mt. 23:2-3). They sat in Moses' seat, which means that the scribes and Pharisees had assumed that it was their duty to explain the law. However, they were not followers of the very law that they taught. Therefore, Jesus taught His disciples to keep Moses' law, but that they were not to follow the example set by the scribes and Pharisees—“for they say, and do not”

The scribes and Pharisees were always willing to stand in the limelight and dictate to others what they must do in order to be pleasing to God. Nevertheless, they were unwilling to comply with their own rules. About this, Jesus explained: “[T]hey bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers” (Mt. 23:4). The scribes and Pharisees wanted the respect of men, but they refused to respect God.

But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi (Mt. 23:5-7).

It matters not how we appear on the outside to the world. The only thing that really matters is how we appear on the inside to God.

Matthew 23 continues with Jesus' stern rebuke of the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus calls them “hypocrites” seven times in this one chapter. He describes them as “whited sepulchers.” They may appear righteous on the outside, but in reality they are like tombs full of rotting flesh. Such is true of all hypocrites—the hypocritical Jews of the first century and the hypocritical Christians of today.

### PHARISAISM IN THE CHURCH

Though under different covenants, the Jews of centuries past and the Christians of today share the commonality of knowing God's law. Ignorance was not an excuse then, nor is it now. When the rich man of Luke 16 wished to return to teach his brethren, Abraham informed him that his brothers had Moses and the prophets, therefore they were without excuse. The Jews had the Law of Moses. Today, we have the New Testament which guides us into all Truth. Even with the blessing of the written Word, there are some who would pervert the plan that God has for them. Even in the church of our Lord Jesus Christ, there are some who will not practice what they preach.

Like the Pharisees of old, some members of the body of Christ have decided to put burdens and strains on God's people that God has not placed upon them. Every member of the church today should heed the inspired words of James previously noted. Brethren need to make sure that they are willing to "walk the walk" and "not just talk the talk." Hypocrisy will slow the growth of the Lord's church. How dare we or anyone do anything to stop the spread of New Testament Christianity? Still pertinent today are the questions Paul raises:

Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? (Rom. 2:21-23).

It is most certainly required that we, as the children of God, help others deal with their sins. Likewise, it is required that we teach others of the fatal malady of the soul—sin. We must be bold in our condemnation of disobedience, but, at the same time, we must also consider ourselves while we are teaching. Jesus illustrated this fact when He said:

Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of

thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye (Mt. 7:1-5).

Here, contrary to what some think, Jesus is not teaching that we are forbidden to confront a brother who is committing sin. He is teaching just the opposite. However, in this teaching, our Lord is instructing us to be willing to make the necessary corrections regarding our own sins, then, after we have done so, we are to help our brethren with their shortcomings. So it is that we are to "practice what we preach."

God does not accept pharisaism in the church today. Our preachers and teachers need to be of the highest caliber. Certainly, none of them will be sinless. However, every teacher and preacher should be individuals who continue to "walk in the light, as he is in the light" (1 Jn. 1:7). Teachers should not only keep the laws they teach, they should stay away from creating and binding laws that God has not bound. Such is the case when brethren draw a line of fellowship that God has not drawn. We cannot, neither should we try, to fellowship those who are not walking in the light. This is law. However, just because of an opinionated disagreement, we must not withdraw our fellowship from those with whom God is in fellowship. Do not misunderstand. A distinction between "doctrine" and "opinion" is made in the previous sentence. While a withdrawal of fellowship from those teaching doctrinal error may be necessary, there should never be a withdrawal of fellowship when there are disagreements over matters of opinion (judgment). Those who break fellowship over matters of opinion (judgment) are guilty of Christian Pharisaism.

Paul forbids the Pharisaic attitude, writing: "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith" (Rom. 12:3). As with all sin, this is a mind-set problem. When one has the mind-set that he is more important than actually he is, he usually starts believing that he is above keeping commandments. He feels free to dictate laws to others, but considers himself to be immune from any restrictions.

Such individuals may feel "entitled" to sin freely because of the absolution to sin they believe preaching brings them. In no way is this possible. Paul clearly warns that if we preach against sin (and we must), then we are charged to keep the same laws we teach (Rom. 2:21-23 ). No individual, no matter what his status is among brethren, has the

right to forgo the commands of our Creator. As we lead others, let us remember that we too are followers, followers of the Christ Jesus. Everyone, including preachers, will be judged by the same standard (Jn. 12:48).

### **BLIND LEADING THE BLIND**

In speaking of hypocritical teachers, Paul lets it be known that they considered themselves to be guides of the blind, “a light of them which are in darkness” (Rom. 2:19). Yet, those who teach, *but refuse to do*, are truly blind themselves. What a sad situation to have the blind leading the blind. Concerning the Pharisees, Jesus noted: “Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch” (Mt. 15:14). Besides calling them hypocrites, our Lord also referred to these same teachers as “blind guides” (Mt. 23:16). One of the most detrimental things to men’s souls is men behind the pulpit who have no business being there. Too many congregations have been torn asunder by such men. Too many churches have left their first love and are now worshipping at the altars of extremism, extremism to the “right” and extremism to the “left”—the “right” binding what God *has not* bound and the “left” loosing what God *has* bound.

### **A TRUE LIGHT OF THEM THAT ARE IN DARKNESS**

Concerning Jesus, Isaiah prophesied: “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light” (Isa. 9:2). Of Jesus, John recorded: “In him was life; and the life was the light of men ... That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (Jn. 1:4, 9). Likewise, Jesus taught that He was the “light of the world” (Jn. 8:12). Everything about Christ is light, for He is God, and God is light (1 Jn. 1:5). To have a relationship with God and Christ, one must continue in that same light (1 Jn. 1:7). Christians have always been expected to not only walk in the light themselves but to share that light with others. Instructing His disciples about their being a light to the world, Jesus preached:

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Mt. 5:14-16).

We are obligated to have the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5). Christ is the Light! If we have His mind, it only stands to reason that we will walk in the light and share that light with others. We must be a true *light to them that are in darkness*. Preaching alone will not accomplish this. However, preaching the Truth *and* living like Christ will. While we are not "ambassadors" in the same sense as were the Christ's apostles (2 Cor. 5:20; Eph. 6:20), in the sense of having a message, a commission, and being sent under orders, New Testament Christians are the "ambassadors" of Christ today. As such we are charged with the obligation of going into all the world and presenting Christ through His message, the Gospel. Our presentation must not be full of hypocrisy. Rather than that, the world must not only hear our preaching the Christ but it must see the Christ living in us (Gal. 2:20).

#### CONCLUSION

Let us not in self-righteousness *assume* ourselves to be guides of the blind, instructors of the foolish, teachers of babes and lights to them which are in darkness. Let us in sincerity and truth *actually* be those things. We cannot even begin to do so without a proper relationship with Christ. If we are going to instruct people how to walk in the light, we must walk the same path. A possible temptation for those in the brotherhood today is inconsistency. Our duty is to spread New Testament Christianity. For us to fulfill our duty we must be consistently serving God. The world can smell a hypocrite, and they will. Preacher, practice what you preach. Proclaim the Truth. Lead by your words *and* by your actions. Take to heart the inspired words of the apostle Paul: "be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12). "Consistency thou art a jewel."

#### ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are taken from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

# “WISER THAN THE CHILDREN OF LIGHT”

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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

The parable of Luke 16:1-13 may strike us in several possible ways. In it we see a servant who has not only reflected a lack of loyalty, but also dishonesty. He is described as the “steward” of a rich man. According to H. Leo Boles,<sup>2</sup> in this position, the man was responsible for looking after the estate, keeping the household stores and dispensing them as needed. Instead of carrying out his responsibilities, he was accused of wasting his master's goods. We are not otherwise told how he had misused his master's goods. When called by his master to give an account, there is no indication that he made any denial or offered an excuse. He was informed that if he could not provide an adequate explanation, he would no longer be the steward. At least he was honest with himself and in his own mind did not make an effort to justify his actions. We see his thought process as he reasons with himself. He did not consider himself suitable for physical labor such as digging, and he was ashamed to beg. It was not that either of these choices was not a possibility, but certainly not something desired.

At various times the economy takes a downward trend and many fine people, who are good workers, find themselves without employment. They may hold several college degrees, have always held responsible positions that did not involve physical labor, and are possibly 40 or 50 years old. They might feel much the same way about the possible means of earning a living. They are not physically fit for doing manual labor for a living, and they are too proud to beg.

In this steward, we see something of his mental nature that most likely goes hand in hand with the dishonesty he had already demonstrated. This would probably never have crossed the mind of an honest man. Clearly, he chose a course of action that would endear him to others and offer the potential of doors of opportunity being opened, once he was no longer a steward. He contacted his master's debtors and determined the amount that each owed. He then instructed each to change what was rightfully owed to a lesser amount. In this, we can get something of a glimpse of the character of the debtors. From every indication the steward reasoned that these men would be receptive to such a suggestion, and he was bold enough to make the offer. At that moment, he apparently was still in the position of steward and had the authority to act as an agent of his master. Even if we consider the debtors to be completely innocent, the very nature of the steward's proposal suggests that something is not quite right. Here is a debt that is rightfully owed, and you are being asked to greatly reduce the amount owed with nothing asked in return. The very nature of the request is sufficient to cause the debtors to have doubts and ask *why* the debt was being reduced.

As the parable continues, we are not told how the debtors reacted when told to reduce the amount owed. One thing is clear. That is, the master became aware of what was done by the steward. It is unlikely that the steward told him. One might surmise that some accounting was done, one or more of the debtors may have told the master, or rumors may have spread. In any event, the master became aware of what the steward was doing. We are not told the outcome, but surely the relationship between the rich man and his steward was severed. The steward might have been thrown into prison. Although it might have been interesting to have greater details included in the parable, they are not necessary for the lesson being presented.

The parable concludes with the rich man commending the unjust steward because he had done wisely. This does not suggest that the actions of the steward pleased the rich man, or that it saved the man from any punitive consequences. After all, if the steward was being asked for an accounting with the threat of being removed as the steward, it is beyond reason, at this point, for him to be praised and retained as steward for dishonest conduct which was detrimental to the rich man in the very area in which the steward had responsibility. Under normal conditions, the commendation seems out of place. In

view of the total picture, it should not be considered that the master was pleased with the steward. If anything, the conduct of the steward merely confirmed the accusation and no further accounting, explanation or proof was needed. So, why was there a commendation by the rich man? It was simply the fact that under the circumstances, the steward had acted with wisdom. He knew he could not satisfactorily explain his conduct and that within a short time he would no longer be a steward. He needed a new position and others, knowing of why he was dismissed, were not likely to trust or employ him. Not being suitable for physical labor and too proud to beg, where could he turn? A possibility was to create a favorable situation among those with whom he had dealings, and who would be more likely than those who were indebted to his master? Surely, they would be pleased to have their indebtedness greatly reduced, and they may have been on more friendly terms with the steward than they were with his master. If they went along with his proposal, they would owe him a debt of gratitude that could open doors of opportunity. We have heard the expression: "When the world hands you a lemon, make lemonade." It is probably much easier said than done. You make the best of a bad situation and try to turn it to your favor. As dishonest as it was, that is exactly what the steward did. He is not commended for what he did, but for the wisdom he exercised under the circumstances.

### **BODY**

#### *Who Is The "Lord" In Verse 8?*

The individual identified in verse 8 as the "lord" is spoken of in verse 1 as a certain rich man. As far as the parable goes, the word "lord," as used at this point, is referring to the same individual and does not have a spiritual or deity connotation. It is only as we consider the lesson contained in the parable that we see who is being represented. The rich man or lord in the parable no doubt represents God. In many respects this parable is like others, such as the one in Matthew 25:14-30. In that parable, the man who was going on a journey called his servants and delivered to them his goods with the expectation that they would invest what they had received and make a profit for him. When he returned, he obtained an accounting and dealt with each according to how they had carried out their responsibilities. In each instance, there seems little doubt that we are getting a pictorial description of God's relationship with man. Following the parable in Matthew 25 is a vivid

picture of the judgment scene. What we are seeing in Luke 16 is a different view of the master-servant relationship and most assuredly not an approval of misconduct/sin.

*Who Are The Children Of This World  
And What Does That Mean?*

The identity of “the children of this world” might be considered from more than one aspect. Generally speaking, they could be classed as those who are not Christians and thus, those of the dark versus those in the light, those saved versus those not saved, those spiritual versus those who are not spiritual. Another possibility is that it relates to those whose thoughts and ambitions relate to this world. Regrettably, this could also embrace some who are Christians. Their thoughts, desires and ambitions are not directed towards pleasing their Master, Who is God.

In the same verse, “the children of this world” are placed in opposition to “the children of light.” The children of light must be those who are faithful, obedient servants of God. We note in verse 1 that Jesus spoke this parable to His disciples. It was not directed to those, such as the scribes and Pharisees, who constantly opposed Him. His disciples were those who were His followers, and no doubt it was expected that they learn a lesson from this parable. Thus, the children of the world/dark are especially those whose concerns are for this world, while the children of light are the children of God/Christians (It might even embrace those who claim to be followers/disciples of Christ, but who walk in error). The children of the world can easily be wiser in their earthly pursuits than those who claim to be followers of Christ, but who do not serve Him with the same attitude and diligence as those who seek earthly goals.

*In What Way Are The Children Of This World  
Wiser Than The Children Of Light?*

Clearly, the children of this world are not wiser than the children of light in all matters. If they were, they would not be children of this world. They would be children of light and live so as to please God. It might assist us in determining the answer to take note of what James wrote regarding wisdom after speaking about the use of the tongue for both good and evil. He wrote:

Who is a wise man and endowed with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness

of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace (Jas. 3:13-18).

Here, we see a clear indication that there are at least two types of wisdom; one is from above and spiritual in nature, and the other is of an earthly nature. Without a doubt, anything that is sinful in nature is earthly, and it should be particularly recognized when it reflects such characteristics as envy and strife. The wisdom from above is completely opposite. At the same time, we should be aware that we may not always readily see the difference between the two forms of wisdom. We need to stop and take a closer look at our lives and personal interests.

In Matthew 6:21, Jesus said: “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” He had just warned against laying up treasures on earth that rust and can be stolen. Instead, He admonished that we should lay up treasures in heaven that do not decay and cannot be stolen. This is another way of contrasting earthly wisdom with heavenly wisdom. We may basically be honest people who are good, hardworking parents, neighbors and citizens. We may not have the slightest desire to be rich, powerful, or famous. However, all of our dreams are tied to things of this earth. You may be happy as a lark to just lean back in an easy chair and watch TV while the rest of the world goes by. That may be just fine as far as this earthly life is concerned as you are getting just what you want, but you are not laying up any treasures in heaven. It reflects earthly wisdom just as much as others who are working as hard as they can for all of the fame and fortune they can lay their hands on. That is where their heart is, and it all relates to the earthly life and provides absolutely no preparation for life after death.

*Who Are Those Included In The Word “Generation” In Verse 8?*

At first glance it might appear that Jesus’ statement relates to only the generation He was addressing, but such does not appear to be the case. Rather, He seems to address the children of this world versus the children of light in any generation, as in verse 8, He states: “... for the

children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." The American Standard Version renders it, "their own generation." Even without such an indication, it should be readily seen that such attitudes have existed in every generation. Men may change in some ways, but their basic attitudes have remained the same throughout history, regardless of language and cultural differences. That is one good reason why the Word of God never goes out of date.

*What Are Some Of The Lessons The Children Of Light Can Learn From The Unjust Steward?*

There are probably many more lessons to be learned than we might readily observe. In the hereafter, we will probably be amazed at the great depth of the Scriptures. Even the brightest and most ardent student of the Bible will probably have only scratched the surface of what is there to be learned. It is only natural that we learn at the feet of others, starting with our parents and siblings. Many of our best instructors are those with great "hands on" experience in the field of study. If we are going to study the ways of criminals, where is a better place to start than with those who are or have been criminals? What are the skills used by those who successfully break and enter, counterfeit money, illegally open safes, *et cetera*? Where can we better learn than from those who know their trade? In a like manner, the children of light may learn from the children of the world. That is not to say that they are to become like the children of the world, but that they have something to teach the children of light.

Illustrations, possibly as good as any, are those of individuals who have come out of the world and had to make great changes in their lifestyle, or those who have come out of denominations. They may have a better appreciation of what it means to be a Christian as God intends, and of Truth versus error. However, what might be something to be learned from the conduct and attitude of the unjust steward, and others of that nature, that is applicable to the life of a Christian?

The steward was looking out for what he considered was best for him. Although we do not know exactly what he was doing that brought about the accusation that he was wasting his master's goods, it was apparently what he wanted to do, and it furthered his goals. If our hearts are on those things that are spiritual, and we are desirous of being a faithful servant of God, then that is our goal or aim in life. In the process, we will be doing what is best for us while we are on earth,

and we will be making preparation for our eternal home. Too many Christians are not giving that type of attention to their lives. For all practical purposes they are straddling the fence, and if caught in the position of the unjust steward, they would not know which way to jump.

The steward saw the difficult situation he was in, even though it was of his own creation. He knew that he was going to be required to give an accounting of all that had been placed in his keeping, and he knew his master was not going to be pleased. He clearly began to explore his options. There did not appear to be all that many, and most of what he saw was not acceptable or realistic. The one that he saw was no more just than his conduct that put him in the predicament, but it did no more than add a bit more to the troubles he already had. At the same time, there was the potential of finding a safe haven among those he was benefitting. If they accepted his offer, they were all in it together. What more was there to lose than was going to happen if he did nothing? It was worth the gamble.

How many people, in their spiritual lives, are looking ahead and evaluating the consequences of their past actions, and making a decision as to their best course of action to salvage what they can? Christians, even at their best are far less than perfect. If at this very moment we had to suddenly stand before God and give an account for our lives, would it be satisfactory? God has placed certain things in our hands. It may include good health, above average intelligence, certain talents, various opportunities, physical assets, living in a free society, good Christian parents, *et cetera*. What have we done with all that He has handed to us to look after and use on His behalf? Like the rich man, God already knows, and He will be asking us to give Him an accounting. Will we be forced to say something like: "I am not sure where it all went, but to be honest, I think I used most of my life for myself and what I wanted?" If so, does that not sound like the expected response from the steward? However, the steward did not stop at the point where he knew that he must give an accounting. He was looking for a way out of big trouble, and he wanted to make arrangements before the roof fell in on him.

Again, consider what may apply to many Christians. The evaluation of the seven churches recorded in Revelation 2-3 can very likely apply to the general spiritual condition of churches of the Lord down through the ages. The Lord was not pleased with most of them and their

problems covered a wide range. Clearly, some of them thought everything was just fine when it was far from it. The steward had his eyes wide open. He knew exactly what he had done, the nature of the accusation against him, that he could not justify his conduct, and what he could expect from his master. This prompted him to evaluate his options and take a definite course of action that he thought would be the best for him. Christians, of all people, should know what God expects of them, what they have done that is pleasing or not pleasing, and select the best course of action. This means that they see their sins for just what they are; they know the conduct is not pleasing to God, their master, and they take the best course of action, which is to repent and do the works that He expects of them. A look at many congregations may lead you to believe that many Christians have their eyes and ears closed. They do not seem to recognize or admit that they are spiritually lukewarm, spiritually dead, have left their first love, or are departing from the Truth.

In the day to day places of work, it is not uncommon for periodic evaluations to be made of employees. For the good employee who is beginning to slip, it is a time to get him back on the right track, and the results are usually very satisfactory. However, a variety of reactions may come from others. Some will take great offense and be angry, others will place the blame on management or fellow workers, and with others it will pass over them as if they neither heard nor understood anything that was said. It can easily be the same in our relationship with God.

Consider what might be prudent in everyday affairs for what we might like to think of as the average ordinary adult. As such, they have average intelligence, average income, and average expenses. What might be reasonably expected of their handling of their daily affairs? Here is a list of what might be expected, with the realization that it will not apply to everyone, but they will probably wish that it did:

1. They will live within their income.
2. They will pay their bills on time.
3. They will regularly put aside funds for retirement and a rainy day.
4. They will be honest and dependable in carrying out their responsibilities.
5. They will seek to improve themselves and their lot in life.

Other factors might be added, but those are sufficient to provide the basic concept. Even if one does not live according to these principles, he will very likely agree that they are desirable traits to possess. Then, stop and realize that we are thinking about our day to day lives on this earth that can come to an end at any time. Many individuals who are not Christians live (or desire to live) according to these ideals.

Often little children are asked what they want to be when they grow up. Both, the one asking the question and the child, are likely to be thinking of an earthly vocation. At a young age, the answer may be a “cowboy” or “nurse.” As they grow older, they may start seriously thinking of what they want to do with their life, and, even then, they are generally thinking of an earthly work, as most will need to earn a living. If they cannot make a real decision, their plans can easily include a college education. Even after entering the work force, many career fields require additional yearly training so as to remain current.

Lifetimes are spent in seeking a good life on earth, not to mention those who purposely are seeking power, fame and/or fortune. How many would obtain college degrees if it were solely for the purpose of being better educated? At least in the back of the mind is likely the thought that the additional education will enable one to have a better status in life with a higher income, a better home, opportunities, *et cetera*. It may not come to pass or bring happiness. One may not live long enough to enjoy the fruits of his labors. How much of what is achieved will one be able to take with them beyond the grave? Everyone knows the answer. We brought nothing with us when we entered this life, and we will take nothing with us when we leave.

Efforts to make the most of our earthly lives can easily be taken for granted. Most parents want their children to do well in everything they undertake. We want them to get a good education, have a good profession, have a good marriage, a good home, a good bank account, *et cetera*. In other words, obtain all of the comforts and riches this world has to offer. Those who really make the effort are likely to be successful because that was their goal. Does this teach us anything of the wisdom of those of the world in contrast to those who belong to Christ? Are those of the world wiser because they more clearly see what they want, and the effort needed to achieve their goal?

The steward was prudent even if he was a failure and possibly dishonest as a steward. He was doing his best to make provision for the time when he lost his position. Employees who can see a pink slip on

the horizon, whether or not they have been a good employee, will start making efforts to find new employment. Frequently, one of the best sources is the contacts that have been made through their existing position. Friends and those who owe you favors are often stepping stones to a new position. Keep in mind that Jesus was speaking to His disciples. How prudent are Christians in looking after their spiritual affairs as compared to those of the world in looking after their earthly affairs? Even closer to home might be the question of whether Christians give as much consideration to looking after their spiritual life as they do after their earthly life? How many Christians might boast about how few sick days they have taken, how many hours they have worked overtime and the bonuses and awards they have received on their earthly job, but can readily miss worship services and be reluctant to accept church related responsibilities? If one is fortunate enough to reach a ripe old age, he most likely is going to be looking back at his earthly achievements. The dedicated Christian, though not able to do all that he had in the past, will still be looking to the future. It is understandable that Jesus said to seek first the kingdom of God (Mt. 6:33). It is not that the children of the world are headed in the right direction. However, in knowing what they want, and in their seeking the best means possible and making the most effort to achieve their goals, they are on the whole wiser than the people of God. That is a sad commentary, but every indication is that it is true. How frequently do we see the Sunday morning attendance drop on Sunday evening, and drop even further when there is a mid-week Bible study? When there is a request for volunteers, what percentage of the members respond? How frequently might it be correctly said that 90 percent of the work of a congregation is done by 10 percent of its members, and it is the same members over and over again. Of those who are not actively involved in the Lord's work, how many are earnestly devoting their time, talents and assets to matters that relate to this world?

#### **LESSONS TO BE LEARNED**

Much of what has already been discussed can easily be seen as lessons to be learned. However, it might be beneficial to consider some actual situations in which we might find that we could easily be seen as one of the parties.

There are some who are inclined to look upon those of the legal profession with a bit of skepticism, unless, of course, it is the attorney

who is representing them. Unless one is around courts and otherwise see attorneys in the practice of their profession, they may not take notice. Should you have the opportunity to observe, you are likely to note that attorneys may oppose one another with great vim and vigor, and then be seen with one another on very friendly terms. There is a good reason for this, and it is not really an oddity or something that relates only to the legal profession. It is a matter of separating the individual from the issue in controversy.

Some years ago, this writer attended what in essence was a lectureship at a university. There were several speakers each hour at different locations on the campus. One that I happened to attend was held in a good size auditorium. Shortly after the speaker began his presentation, he told how that in driving to the university he had passed through several states and one of his days of travel fell on a Sunday. He stopped for services at what apparently was a congregation of the Lord in a country area. The speaker then began to describe the preacher at that congregation. He started by making fun of the man's haircut and then of his attire. After ridiculing the preacher's outward appearance, the speaker then started to speak unfavorably about the preacher's sermon topic, which was the Lord's glorious church. I cannot recall whether any mention was made of Ephesians 5:27, but in that verse Paul does speak of the glorious church. If the preacher was teaching error, it might have readily been addressed without reference to the appearance of the individual. It would seem that the unfavorable comments about the man's appearance were to set the stage for the comments about his lesson. If an unfavorable impression of the individual has already set the stage, then it is much easier to sell the thought that his message was also unfavorable.

Back to the relationship of attorneys. If their basic debate is about facts and law, they can argue for hours or days and still maintain a good personal relationship. In many instances, they are merely trying to make the best presentation possible in the representation of their client. This may or may not represent their personal beliefs. In a criminal case the defending attorney may know that his client is guilty as charged. Even so, he will expect the prosecution to prove its case, and he will make the best possible defense on behalf of the accused. This does not mean that the defense counsel will lie or do anything that might be considered, "shady." Under such conditions, cases can proceed without the personalities or appearance of an attorney ever becoming involved.

Each side is representing his side of the case to the best of their ability. It might be much like playing a game or some sport where everyone plays fair and by the rules. Someone will lose, but they can shake hands and walk away without any animosity and as friends.

Let us return to the discussion of the conduct of some of our brethren, who should be examples of Christian conduct to the brotherhood, those in the denominational world, and the world in general. Time and again, we can see those who fill the pulpits, and others in positions of spiritual leadership, speaking and writing about their brethren by attacking the individual instead of the issue being opposed. It is one thing to state a belief that one has spoken error and then to point out the nature of that error. It is entirely another matter when all forms of derogatory language are directed at the person they oppose and then to go on to spread those comments throughout the brotherhood. It is easy to discuss disagreements with another when our comments relate only to the topic under consideration. Personalities and character do not enter into the discussion. Very few will agree on literally everything, but when these differences are handled in a Christian manner, they do not necessarily harm a relationship. There may be some point in which we may not be able to fellowship another because of those differences, but even then it can be done with a proper attitude toward one another.

When personalities become involved, the bridges between the parties can easily be destroyed. One may start the process, and the other may respond in like manner. If not, they may be inclined to decide that they want nothing to do with such an individual, if that is what they think about them. Most can readily go back to one who does not always agree with them and discuss any topic when personalities do not become involved. How many really want anything to do with a person who immediately attacks them?

Attorneys are not the only individuals who provide an example, but it is a clear contrast in the wisdom of the world versus what we often see in the wisdom of those who are Christians. We have possibly seen something of the same nature with neighbors and in work places. Many probably have neighbors with whom, if a difference arose, you can easily go to them, and it can be discussed without any ill feeling. There would be no name calling or spreading gossip in the neighborhood. On the job, more often than not, we are likely to find that differences do arise with fellow workers and supervisors. It is not uncommon to be

able to calmly and rationally discuss the issues and reach a resolution. It may not always be what you or others desired, but, normally, everyone returns to work, and there are no ill feelings. Likely there are several reasons. There is a job to be done and thoughts are focused on that goal, even if there are differences as to how it is to be achieved. Also, usually personalities do not become involved. Individuals are not called “liars,” “stupid” and other such terms. In fact, whether on purpose or otherwise, an effort is likely made to keep everyone in a positive frame of mind. Too often in the church we see exactly the opposite. The church has the truth on how to live in our relationship with both God and man, but far too often the world can set a better example of how to put it into practice. Companies will go to great effort and expense to generate the proper work environment and good management because it is good business. Do we see the same thing in the church?

In another situation, the base where this writer was assigned was receiving complaints from a number of personnel regarding treatment from an automobile dealership in the area. As the senior legal officer, I discussed the matter with the installation commander. Ultimately, we made contact with the owner of the dealership and invited him to meet with us to discuss the issue. He accepted the invitation. His initial comment was that, at first, it made him angry. However, as he thought about the situation, he realized that he was in business to sell and service automobiles. To do so, it was important for him to have a good reputation and a good relationship with his customers. He invited the installation commander and me to visit the dealership, which we did. During the visit we were given a complete tour of the facility. However, what was most important were his comments at the conclusion of our visit. He told us that with any future complaints, he would like for us to investigate them, and he would go along with any decision we made as to how any issues should be resolved. We never received any more complaints about that dealership while I was at that base.

I knew nothing of the character of the owner of the car dealership. Whatever his character, was he exercising good wisdom? Surely, the answer is “Yes!” Why was he able to do so? He was able to put his initial reaction aside and focus on his basic goal. He was in business to make money through the sale and servicing of automobiles. The greatest success could come only if he provided a good, honest service and maintained a good relationship with his customers. Apparently, it

did not take him very long to decide on a course of action that would best help him reach his goals. It also took a measure of trust on his part to place the resolution of any complaints in the hands of those who were raising the issue.

In some respects, this might remind us of an event in the early church, recorded in Acts 6, when there was a complaint that the Grecian widows were being neglected. The congregation was asked to select men to look after the matter. The names of at least some of those selected appear to be Grecians. How many Christians will react in the same manner today? In 1 Corinthians 6, the apostle Paul addresses the problem of Christians going to law with one another and that before judges who are not Christians. In spite of such teaching, and the abundance of instruction on Christian living, Christians engage in all forms of misconduct and legal action against one another. What is our problem when such is the case? In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul said their problem was that they still acted like the world. Even so, those of the world may often show greater wisdom than those of the church. This can easily occur when they clearly have a goal, are clearly focused on it, and are diligently working to achieve that goal. In that respect, they are far wiser than Christians who do not reflect the same attitude and effort.

### CONCLUSION

Chances are that most of us know far more about the Scriptures than we put into practice. We are likely to be caught up too much in the daily affairs of the world and fail to recognize how far short we fall from the standard set by God. The world may exercise greater wisdom and effort in seeking those things that will perish with this earth than Christians do in preparing for eternal life. To make it worse, those who are earthly may never achieve their goal(s) and may lose all that they may gain, while faithful Christians can achieve their goal, and it will not be lost either on earth or in eternity. We would do well to heed the plain and simple words:

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a

forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed (Jas. 1:22-25).

Let us not forget that the words of the parable in Luke 16:1-13 were spoken by Jesus to His disciples. It will be sad enough for a Christian to find on the day of judgment that he is eternally lost. However, it will be an even greater shame to learn that he failed to exercise the same wisdom as those of the world. He knew it was a time intended to prepare for eternity, but that time was wasted on those things that were very temporary at best.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are taken from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> H. Leo Boles, New Testament Commentaries, "Luke" (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co., 1940), 309.

# “THEIR FOOLISH HEART WAS DARKENED”

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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened (Rom. 1:21).

Our study is entitled “Walk in the Light.” My assignment is to discuss “Their Foolish Heart was Darkened” as it relates to our own “Walk In the Light.” In so doing, we have been called upon to address the following points.

1. Give the contextual setting of Romans 1:21.
2. Trace the steps man follows on his way to having a darkened heart.
3. Relative to God and His will, explain that man has no excuse for having a darkened heart.
4. Note that the worldly wise (intellectuals) are “foolish” and have darkened hearts.
5. Show how foolish and darkened hearts have contributed to the ruination of our society.

## THE CONTEXTUAL SETTING OF ROMANS 1:21

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God (Rom. 1:1).

To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:7).

I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also (Rom. 1:14-15).

There can be no doubt that Paul was/is the author of the Roman letter and that this epistle was written to the church or Christians at Rome. Scholars believe it was probably written from Corinth during Paul's third missionary journey.

This conclusion is reached from the following facts: (1) The bearer of the letter was Phebe, an active member of the church at Cenchrea, the seaport town of Corinth (16:1). (2) At the time of writing, Paul was a guest of Gaius (16:23), whom he had baptized at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:14). (3) He sends greetings also from "Erastus, the treasurer of the city" (16:23). The way this is mentioned points to "the city" as of considerable importance. This would point to Corinth, and at Corinth we learn that Erastus was left behind on Paul's latest journey (2 Tim. 4:20).<sup>2</sup>

The church at Rome is believed to have been established by the Roman citizens who were responsive to the teaching of the Gospel on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-11). Paul had desired to visit the brethren at Rome for quite sometime but, thus far, had been hindered from doing so (Rom. 1:11; 15:22-24). His visit, at least in part, was to impart some spiritual gifts unto them (Rom. 1:11). In his absence, and before his visit, Paul pens his Roman letter to inform the brethren there of his intentions and to provide a tentative time for his trip (Rom. 15:24-28).

In the first seventeen verses of Romans 1, Paul stresses the importance and the need of the Gospel of Christ in the lives of all men (Rom. 1:1-17). Without the Gospel of Christ, there is no salvation. He stresses:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith (Rom. 1:16-17).

In the following verses of this chapter, Paul presents the depraved condition of those in the Gentile world, those who had rejected the counsel of God to walk in their own wisdom (Rom. 1:18-32). As a result of going their own way, their moral depravity and sensual behaviour was even more base than the brute beasts of the field who

have no understanding at all. However, God’s condemnation of those who choose to spurn His counsel was not limited to the Gentiles alone, it was also extended toward the disobedient Jews. In the following two chapters, Paul points out that the Jew was as prone to sin and judgment as was the Gentile. Paul pens:

What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one (Rom. 3:9-10).

But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile (Rom. 2:8-9)

For there is no respect of persons with God (Rom. 2:11).

There were times in the history of Israel when they too deserved to be destroyed in judgment. This is clear from Paul saying: “And as Esaias said before, Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodoma, and been made like unto Gomorrhah” (Rom. 9:29). For the elect’s sake then, and the future salvation afforded those in Christ, God overlooked or postponed their judgment at that time. He knew that later on these individuals, along with all mankind would be held accountable for their actions in the final day of judgment. The same was said of, and is true for, the Gentile world. Paul’s sermon to the Athenians on Mars Hill addressed the same depravity of mankind which is mentioned in the Roman letter (cf. Acts 17:22-31). Again, as in the case of Israel mentioned above, God overlooked their sin or judgment at that time knowing they would be held accountable later on at the final Judgment Day. Speaking on Mars Hill, Paul told his audience:

Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead (Acts 17:29-31).

Before Christ and salvation entered into the world, God overlooked a great deal of man’s wrong doing in order to make salvation possible

through the blood of Jesus. Note, God did not overlook their sins, but rather the immediate accountability for their sins.

For emphasis sake, let us again state the contextual setting of our passage for this lecture (Rom. 1:21). Paul was illustrating to the Christians at Rome, both Jew and Gentile, the moral depravity of man when he departs from the way of God to walk after his own counsel. He writes these things in order to exhort and encourage those at Rome, as well as those of all generations, to obey and abide in the teachings of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **HOW DOES MAN OBTAIN A DARKENED HEART?**

A darkened heart is the result of ignorance and/or the willful neglect of God's Word. Either condition will lead to the same result. God, speaking through Hosea, said:

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children (Hos. 4:6).

Notice how the *willful* neglect of one generation can lead to *ignorant* neglect on the part of subsequent generation. As a result, both generations are forgotten by God. No wonder the wise man penned: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Pro. 22:6). Just before their entrance into the promised land, God, through Moses, told Israel: "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deut. 6:6-7). Obviously, Israel failed to hearken to these instructions from God; therefore, it is written: "And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel" (Jgs. 2:10).

At another point in Israelite history, the Jewish men had taken wives of foreign nations (Neh. 13:23). God had forbidden this practice, stating:

Take heed to thyself, lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither thou goest, lest it be for a snare in the midst of thee ... Lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they go a whoring after their gods,

and do sacrifice unto their gods, and one call thee, and thou eat of his sacrifice; And thou take of their daughters unto thy sons, and their daughters go a whoring after their gods, and make thy sons go a whoring after their gods (Ex. 34:12, 15-16).

Israel ignored that admonition and, as a result, their children no longer spake the language of God and His people. Nehemiah 13:23-24 states: “In those days also saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab: And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people.”

Ignorance of God's will leads to a darkened heart. Christianity is a taught religion (Jn. 6:44-45). The above passages should exhort and encourage us to bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4), and to warn them against evil communications (1 Cor. 15:33 and 2 Cor. 6:14-18). However, when man has determined in his mind to have it his way, God will allow him to follow his own steps unto his own destruction.

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient (Rom. 1:28).

There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death (Pro. 14:12).

In tracing the steps of man's digression into spiritual depravity, Coffman notes:

The step-by-step progression of the spiritual condition of them that turn away from God is outlined in the three short paragraphs in this part of Paul's letter, each of them beginning with the statement that God gave them up.

What happens to the worship of God under conditions prevailing after God has given man up? (1) There is the conscious neglect of God's worship, coupled with ingratitude and failure to give God thanks for all his mercies. As a consequence of this, the mind itself is darkened (v.21). (2) Next, idolatry ensues with the worship of things more and more abased, first, images of men, then worship of birds, beasts, and finally creeping things—All this accompanied by sensuality. (3) God gives them up to the sensuality they have preferred, with the resultant immorality. (4) God gives them up even further to the progressive erosion of the very principle of morality, lending to perversion and depravity of both sexes. (5) Finally, God gives them up to complete and

irreversible reprobacy of mind, leading to conditions in men that deserve the sentence of death to be executed upon them (vv. 28-32).<sup>3</sup>

Stated succinctly: 1) Those who are not thankful for God and His provisions for man, turn away from worship of God which in turn leads to ignorance of God, 2) Next comes idolatrous worship. Whether it be worship of self, others, earth (pantheism), etc., 3) Then comes immorality and sexual gratification including adultery, 4) Sexual perversion follows this: Homosexuality, bestiality, orgies, etc., 5) Finally, all ethical behavior decays. Suddenly lying, cheating, and even murder is acceptable (euthanasia, abortion, etc.). At this point man's heart is completely darkened and void of any understanding or comprehension of God and/or His will.

Remember, all of these things begin with the dethronement of God and the enthronement of man. It is a rejection of God's wisdom (Rom. 1:26), and the exaltation of man's wisdom (Rom. 1:22). This is defined as Humanism. Explaining Humanism, Humanists enthusiastically proclaim:

Humanism is a philosophical, religious, and moral point of view ... Each age seeks to define what *its* distinctive *values* are ... In 1933 a group of thirty-four liberal humanists in the United States ... drafted Humanist Manifesto 1 ... Forty years later Humanist Manifesto II was drafted. This more extensive and comprehensive document addresses itself not only to the *problems of religion and ethics*, but to the pressing issues of civil liberties, the survival of humankind, *world economic growth, population, and ecological control*, war and peace, and the *building of a world community* ... *if no deity will save us, we must save ourselves* (emphasis added).<sup>4</sup>

Well did Jeremiah warn those of his own day: "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23). May we heed his warning lest our own foolish hearts become darkened.

### NO EXCUSE

Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse (Rom. 1:19-20).

The cosmological and teleological arguments for the existence of God have never been, nor can they be, refuted. Nature declares His existence and His superiority over man. The writer of Hebrews points out:

For every house is builded by some man; but he that built all things is God (Heb. 3:4).

The sweet Psalmist said:

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork (Ps. 19:1).

The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity: there is none that doeth good (Ps. 53:1).

When Scriptures such as those above are compiled and due thought is given to them, it forces a logical conclusion that cannot be successfully denied. The order and majesty of the universe and nature declare the existence of a supernatural architect. Only a fool (someone devoid of understanding) would attempt to deny the evidence. No man has any justifiable excuse for rejecting and refusing to follow God.

As God has revealed His existence through nature, even so, He has revealed His will unto mankind in various ways throughout history. Coffman, in a section he entitled “God’s Revelation to the Gentile Nations,” comments:

In the person of Adam and his descendants for over a thousand years, all the world knew the Lord, received commandments as to how he should have been worshiped, and through the patriarchs were in direct communication with the Almighty. “Lamech, Noah’s father, was born before Adam died.” This means that no generation of history had any better knowledge of God than those generations from Adam to the deluge ... From Noah to Abraham, the pure knowledge was kept alive in the world, and the true worship was carried forward by such faithful priests as Melchizedek.

In the gathering darkness of that long night of idolatry which was about to descend upon the Gentile world, God called Abraham and initiated the device of a chosen people, who would be the custodians of the promise of a Messiah, who would keep alive the true teachings of God, and who were designed to recognize at last, the Messiah, when he should appear, and present him to the entire world ...

Following the call of Abraham, the Jewish nation itself became a continual witness to the entire Gentile world of the one true God and His truth ... (1) Abraham testified of “the most high God” to the king of Sodom (Gen. 14:22) ... All the posterity of Abraham through Hagar and Keturah had knowledge of God, these being none other than the whole Arabic nation. (3) Through Lot, Abraham’s nephew, the whole nations of the Moabites and the Ammonites knew God ... (7) Through Jacob, all of Israel; and through Esau, all the Edomites had knowledge of the true God. (8) Through Jacob’s son, Joseph, all of the Egyptians, from the throne downward, knew the “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ... A great leader of the Jews, Moses, appeared; and through him, God visited the entire Egyptian nation with a whole series of the most astounding miracles of pre-Christian history ... God even gave through Moses a personal message to Pharaoh, as follows:

And in very deed, for this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee my power; and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth (Ex. 9:16).

... That God’s method of causing his name to be declared throughout all the earth was successful is proved by the events centering around the name of Rahab, the harlot of Jericho, who, some forty years after the Exodus, said:

I know that the Lord hath given you the land ... for we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt ... For the Lord your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath (Josh. 2:9-11).<sup>5</sup>

Surely the above quotes illustrate that the Gentile world, as well as that of the Jew, had sufficient knowledge of God and His will for mankind. So, again, they were without excuse!

Today, we have the final and complete revelation of God. No other generation has been so blessed as we. Paul wrote:

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God (1 Cor. 2:7-10).

There is indeed a difference between Old Testament revelation and New Testament revelation. Those living under the Old Testament were only given partial knowledge. Today, in the New Testament Dispensation, we have complete knowledge. In essence, Paul makes the same point but words it a little differently in Ephesians 3:3-5, saying:

How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit (Eph. 3:3-5).

Since all has been revealed and made available in written form, prophecy and the other miraculous gifts have ceased (1 Cor. 13:8-13). The purpose of the miraculous was to confirm that the prophet and his message were God sent (Mk. 16:17-20; Heb. 2:1-4). Thus, there was no excuse for spiritual ignorance in ages past, and there is no excuse for it now!

### **WORLDLY WISDOM AND FOOLISHNESS**

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction (Pro. 1:7).

Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men (1 Cor. 1:25).

For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God (1 Cor. 3:19).

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools (Rom. 1:22).

Wisdom is to be found in God and His way. Man is not capable of directing his own steps (Jer. 10:23). The "way of man" only lead to death when he directs his own steps (Pro. 14:12). Worldly wisdom puffeth up, but the counsel of God breeds love (1 Cor. 8:1). This explains why so many who are wise, strong, or wealthy reject the counsel of God. They trust in their wisdom, their strength, and/or their riches instead of God.

For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called ... That no flesh should glory in his presence (1 Cor. 1:26-29).

Earlier, we noted a statement made by the Humanists. About their updated “Manifesto,” saturated with their human pride and worldly wisdom, they boast:

This more extensive and comprehensive document addresses itself not only to the problems of religion and ethics, but to the pressing issue of civil liberties, *the survival of humankind* ... if no deity will save us, we must save ourselves (emphasis added).<sup>6</sup>

Mankind in its worldly wisdom thinks “mother earth” is the giver and sustainer of life. Beyond that they are convinced that they must assist “mother earth” in her tasks lest she fail. The truth is, there is no “mother earth.” Only God is the Giver, Sustainer, and Savior of man. Without Him man could neither be nor continue. In another vein, man would be hopelessly lost.

For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring (Acts 17:28).

For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist (Col. 1:16-17).

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

Even though God has revealed Himself and His will to mankind, man still thinks he knows best. Man even thinks he can overturn the will of God. Exposing how little man knows, God presented Job with a series of questions. To the skeptical intellects of today, we pose the same queries:

Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?  
... Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?  
declare, if thou hast understanding (Job 38:2-4).

Then answered the Lord unto Job out of the whirlwind, and said,  
Gird up thy loins now like a man: I will demand of thee, and  
declare thou unto me. Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? wilt  
thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous? (Job 40:6-8).

God is more than capable of overthrowing the counsel of man. Paul avers:

For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain. Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours (1 Cor. 3:19-21).

For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? (1 Cor. 1:19-20).

God overturned the hate and envy of Joseph's brothers, and their plan to kill him, in order to save the Israelite nation from starvation (Gen. 50:20). He foiled the plan of Haman to annihilate the Jews, and even hung him on the gallows he had built for Mordecai (Est. 7:9-10). He even called upon the enemies of Christianity to perform the deed that would establish Christianity and cement the salvation of mankind for all time.

Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done (Acts 4:25-28).

Today, just as in time past, God's will cannot be changed or altered in any way. Jesus said: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Mt. 24:35). Again, He warned: "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (Jn. 12:48).

Worldly wisdom cannot and will not save anyone. Only a fool would put his faith and confidence in such. May we all humble ourselves before the wisdom of God and hearken to Gamaliel's words: "[I]f it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God" (Acts 5:38-39).

### **A SOCIETY IN RUIN**

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things

which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them (Rom. 1:28-32).

In the above text, Paul describes the society which came about because of the foolish and darkened hearts of men. It is much like our society today. The Gentile world, like America, was given to sexual pleasure and perversion. When man exalts himself as a god (or above the true God), he thinks he is free to determine his own moral and ethical behavior. When man directs his own steps in these areas, he invariably goes a way which is in direct opposition to the way of God. Strongly condemning man's immoral sensuality, God's Word declares:

Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge (Heb. 13:4).

But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints (Eph. 5:3).

For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet (Rom. 1:26-27).

Our present society is rampant with barnyard lusts, broken marriages, broken homes, sexual abuse and neglect in the home, disrespect for all forms of authority, violence, and murder. This is the type of society which is created when man is left to govern himself. And, again, it stands in stark contrast to God and His way.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right (Eph. 6:1).

And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance

of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation (Rom. 13:1-2).

The violence and murder that permeate a society like this are of the most despicable type: Family murdering family, spouses killing spouses, parents preying upon their children (in the form of abortion), and children preying upon their parents (in the form of euthanasia)—and all of it being done for convenience, economics, pleasure, and/or in the name of "humanity." One can only question: "What kind of 'humanity' is it that kills (murders) the weakest and most vulnerable in its society?" "By what stretch of the imagination can a society be called 'humane' that devalues the lives of the unborn, the handicapped, the aged, and anyone else it deems expendable 'in the name of humanity'?" It matters not what man (humanity) says, God decrees: "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man" (Gen. 9:6).

God revealed that even in the accidental killing of an unborn child, the one responsible for the child's death was to be punished. Through Moses, God issued:

If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe (Ex. 21:22-25).

Of this crime, Coffman writes:

They are grossly in error who find this law harsh or unjust. Let it be remembered that this glimpse of Divine Light fell into a world darkened by ages of the grossest paganism, the societies of which wallowed in the most primitive and debased emotional darkness.<sup>7</sup>

To that, Clark adds:

As a posterity among the Jews was among the peculiar promises of their covenant, and as every man had some reason to think that the Messiah should spring from his family, therefore any injury done to a woman with child, by which the fruit of her womb might be destroyed, was considered a very heavy offence; and as the crime was committed principally against her husband, the degree of punishment was left to his discretion. But if

mischief followed, that is, if the child had been fully formed, and was killed by this means, or the woman lost her life in consequence, then the punishment was as in other cases of murder—the person was put to death (v. 23).<sup>8</sup>

How much more serious God must view the deliberate taking of a baby's life while it is yet in the womb!

By exalting himself and/or anything else created by God as the object of worship instead of God, man sinks into the deep abyss of darkness and ignorance which clouds the heart and soul to all true discernment of right and wrong (Rom. 1:22-25). In such a state, man refuses to use the earth for its intended purposes (Gen. 1:28), which will ultimately bring him to ruin. The degree of societal decay is in proportion to the degree of the depravity of mankind.

### **CONCLUSION**

Ignorance, whether willful or otherwise, is the reason mankind develops a foolish and/or darkened heart. Just as Israel allowed the people of the world to educate their sons and daughters (Neh. 13:23-24), we are doing the same today. As a result, we are reaping what we have sown. We now find ourselves in a "Secular, Atheistic Humanist" society. Sexual promiscuity and perversion are rampant. Biblical morality and ethics are virtually nonexistent. Violence and murder are as common as the rising of the sun. We wake each morning to a world of men and women who have foolish and darkened hearts.

Do not forget, Christianity is a taught religion (Jn. 6:44-45). The only way society can be changed is by education. It is past time for us to remove our offspring from the Humanistic indoctrination which permeates our educational institutions. We must, as parents and grandparents, do everything we can to protect our precious little one. Central to doing so means that we must bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). Remember that through Paul, God admonished:

Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.  
Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame (1 Cor. 15:33-34).

### **ENDNOTES**

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are taken from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> David Lipscomb, *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles*, ed. J.W. Shepherd (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company, 1943), 1:12 (Introduction).

<sup>3</sup> James B. Coffman, *Romans* (Abilene, TX: A.C.U. Press, 1984), 46.

<sup>4</sup> *Humanist Manifesto 1*, preface, ed. Paul Kurtz (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1973).

<sup>5</sup> Coffman, 30-32.

<sup>6</sup> Humanist Manifesto.

<sup>7</sup> James B. Coffman, *Exodus* (Abilene, TX: A.C.U. Press, 1985), 310.

<sup>8</sup> Adam Clarke, *Clarke's Commentary, Genesis to Deuteronomy* (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, n.d.), 1:412.

# “DARKNESS AND THE LIGHT ARE BOTH ALIKE”

*Garland Robinson*



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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

God the Father, Jehovah, Yahweh, Deity, is in heaven above. As a matter of fact, He is everywhere. He is not limited to a specific location. God, more specifically the Word (cf. Jn. 1:1-3), is the one that made all “places” that exist. That is, He is the creator of physical matter and the space it occupies. Since He is the Originator and Sustainer, the one who balances and keeps “in check” the material universe by upholding it with the Word of His power (cf. Heb. 1:3), He is not bound or limited by that which He created. He is the one that caused it to exist!

The nature of God is an important topic. There are three distinct characteristics that deity possesses:

1) God is *Omnipotent*. He is *all powerful*. Nothing is too great for Him. Nothing can overpower Him. He is not bound nor limited in His power. Nothing is more powerful than He.

2) God is *Omnipresent*. He is *everywhere*. No place exists that He is not there. There is no place that man can hide from God.

3) God is *Omniscient*. He is *all knowing*. Nothing escapes His notice or knowledge. He sees all and observes all.

It is this third characteristic with which our lesson is concerned. The Bible is filled with passages informing us of God’s omniscience. He sees our actions—literally everything we do. He is well aware of our affairs. The text for this lesson declares it sufficiently. Psalms 139:1-12 states:

O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.

The 139th Psalm is a great highlight and bastion of truth. It will humble every soul that reads and/or hears its lines and in turn gives thoughtful consideration to it. All pale and sink into utter oblivion when they ponder its sublime contents. Many have commented upon its significance, as is seen in these selected quotes:

This Psalm is supposed to have been composed by David when made king of Israel; though some think it was written by him when accused of traitorous designs against Saul. It is a most sublime ode on the wisdom, knowledge, presence, and justice of God: the sentiments are grand, the style highly elevated, and the images various, beautiful, and impressive.<sup>2</sup>

One of the most notable of the sacred hymns. It sings the omniscience and omnipresence of God, inferring from these the overthrow of the powers of wickedness, since he who sees and hears the abominable deeds and words of the rebellious will surely deal with them according to his justice. The brightness of this Psalm is like unto a sapphire stone, or Ezekiel's "terrible crystal"; it flames out with such flashes of light as to turn night into day. Like a Pharos, this holy song casts a clear light even to the uttermost parts of the sea, and warns its (sic) against that practical atheism which ignores the presence of God, and so makes shipwreck of the soul ...

"Thou hast searched me"; and it continues unto this day, since God cannot forget that which he has once known. There never

was a time in which we were unknown to God, and there never will be a moment in which we shall be beyond his observation.<sup>3</sup>

This psalm is, by many of the Jewish doctors, esteemed the most excellent in the whole book. The omniscience of God is here asserted, ver. 1-6. Proved by two arguments; That he is every where present, ver. 7-12. And that he made us, ver. 13-16. This may fill us with pleasing admiration of God, ver. 17, 18. With an holy hatred of sin, ver. 19-22. And with an holy satisfaction in our own integrity, ver. 23, 24.<sup>4</sup>

This Psalm is esteemed by the Hebrews the most excellent in the whole book. The matter of it is noble and sublime, and so is the style. The occasion of it seems to have been those heavy censures and reproaches wherewith David was loaded by his enemies, who branded him for a notorious hypocrite and imposter, that pretended religion only for the covering and promoting his own ambitious and wicked designs against his lawful king, whose life and crown he sought to take away. Against these he comforteth himself with the consideration of God's omniscience, to whom he appeals as the only proper judge of the integrity of his heart.<sup>5</sup>

We need light in order to see. Without it, there is no sight. Without the sun reflecting its light off the moon, we would not behold its beauty and amazement. Beauty and/or ugliness may be right in front of us, but without light we cannot recognize either. Standing before us may be something that would bring great joy or perhaps something that would cause great fear, but in the absence of light we cannot see it.

God does not need light to see. He has no trouble seeing in utter darkness. He is not limited or bound by the absence of light. Psalm 139:12 makes it plain that with God, "the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike ..."

### **CANNOT HIDE FROM GOD**

Almost without exception, men seek the cover of darkness to work their evil deeds. Jesus said: "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (Jn. 3:19). There are even some who are so arrogant and brazen in their wickedness that they do not wait for the cover of darkness. They do their despicable deed in broad day light. Shame unto them and all that love their ways!

Sinful men do not want the light—the truth of God. They do not want to be discovered and brought to justice. They love evil.

Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways (Job 21:14).

They are of those that rebel against the light; they know not the ways thereof, nor abide in the paths thereof (Job 24:13).

They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness: all the foundations of the earth are out of course (Ps. 82:5).

Solomon, speaks of men, "Who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness" (Pro. 2:13). "And say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof" (Pro. 5:12).

#### *Adam And Eve*

Sin entered into the world very early in man's existence. One of the first things Adam and Eve did after eating the forbidden fruit was to hide themselves from God. Genesis 3:8 says: "[T]hey heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden." They found out that you cannot hide from God. Literally everything is in plain view in His sight. "[B]e sure your sin will find you out" (Num. 32:23).

#### *Achan*

Achan tried to hide his evil act of taking spoils out of Jericho. His deed was discovered after Israel's 3,000 men fled from the battle of Ai, which was defended by only a few men (Josh. 7:4). Achan sought to justify his actions saying: "When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it" (Josh. 7:21). He could have buried these vanities deeper than man can dig, but they would not be hidden from God's sight. God knew what he had done and exposed him for it.

#### *Potiphar's Wife*

Potiphar's wife thought she could hide her wicked plans of adultery with Joseph. She begged him day after day, but he refused. She made it so on one occasion, when Joseph came to the house to do his business, that none of the men were there. She and Joseph were all

alone. She took hold of him and would have had her way with him, but he ran away leaving his garment in her hands. Genesis 39:9 says he had asked her, “[H]ow then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” She thought no one would know, it was just the two of them, but Joseph knew that God would know. Nothing is hidden from His sight! Adultery is a great sin against God. It cannot be hidden.

#### *David*

David tried desperately to hide his adultery with Bathsheba by calling her husband home from battle. But when Uriah did not cooperate with David’s plan, David had him put in the forefront of the battle and he was killed. Thinking no one would be the wiser concerning what he had done, David took Bathsheba to be his wife (2 Sam. 11). The Lord revealed David’s deed to Nathan the prophet and David was caught. Be sure your sin will find you out. If not in this life, it will certainly be so in the life to come.

#### *Jonah And Nineveh*

The wickedness of Nineveh, a Gentile city, was known by God. Jonah was dispatched to preach to them of their impending doom. Jonah did not want the city to hear the Word of the Lord. He was afraid they would repent and God would spare them, which is what they did (cf. Jon. 3:10-4:2). Trying to escape the command of God, he “rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord” (Jon. 1:3). Tarshish was in the opposite direction of Nineveh. Though he sought to hide himself in the deepest recesses of the ship, Jonah’s presence was known to God. A great storm arose on the sea, the mariners sought desperately to save themselves, but ultimately threw Jonah overboard. Jonah sank down into the depths of the sea, but God knew where he was. There is no indication the shipmen ever saw Jonah again once they cast him out. He perished out of their sight, but not out of the sight of God. The great fish God had prepared swallowed Jonah and God kept him alive. The omniscience of God is proved beyond question by this historical account of Jonah.

#### *Ananias And Sapphira*

Ananias, along with his wife, Sapphira, sold a piece of property and then lied about their giving. They thought no one would be the wiser.

They coveted the honor and praise they would receive when others learned of their generous gift. However, God knew what they had conspired to do and then went before the apostles and carried out their devious plan. They paid for their wicked deed with their very lives that same day. Their souls even now have regretted a countless number of times over that they could go back and undo their deed. But, it is too late!

How foolish men are when they seek to hide their deeds from the Lord. In Jeremiah 23:24, we read: "Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord." Another clear proof of God's all-seeing eye is Amos 9:3, which states: "And though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence; and though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them."

Isaiah 29:15 says: "Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us?" Job said: "There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves" (Job 34:22). Jeremiah 16:17 declares: "For mine eyes are upon all their ways: they are not hid from my face, neither is their iniquity hid from mine eyes."

God sees. God knows. God keeps count. God remembers. God rewards.

He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him (Dan. 2:22).

[T]he thing that is hid bringeth he forth to light (Job 28:11).

O God, thou knowest my foolishness; and my sins are not hid from thee (Ps. 69:5).

My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth (Ps. 139:15).

Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God? (Isa. 40:27).

For mine eyes are upon all their ways: they are not hid from my face, neither is their iniquity hid from mine eyes (Jer. 16:17).

Are *you* trying to hide from God? It cannot be done!

### GOD KNOWS THE HEART

We know others by their appearance: how they dress, comb their hair, their size and physical features. We can know those things they reveal to us through communication: audio, video or in writing. With a little time and experience, we can learn another's traits and characteristics. We can learn how one may react in various situations. Yet, we cannot know one's heart (unless he reveals it to us). We cannot know what someone is thinking. We cannot know how one feels on the inside. Such knowledge is kept secret by God's design. What chaos would result if we could read each other's minds!

The Lord, on the other hand, flawlessly knows the intents and thoughts of the heart. Such presents no difficulty for Him whatsoever. He knows man's heart as easily as He knows Himself. Job understood this quite well, for he said:

Doth not he see my ways, and count all my steps? (Job 31:4).

For his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings. There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves (Job 34:21-22).

Hell is naked before him, and destruction hath no covering (Job 26:6).

I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee (Job 42:2).

Solomon acknowledged that man's ways are known unto God, and that He knows man's heart as He does all the children of men (1 Kgs. 8:39). The Psalmist said: "[T]hou understandest my thought afar off ... and art acquainted with all my ways" (Ps. 139:2-3). The Lord is able to search our heart (Jer. 17:10).

We read, in 2 Chronicles 16:9, "[T]he eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him." The Psalmist wrote: "God ... knoweth the secrets of the heart" (Ps. 44:21). Proverbs 15:11 informs: "Hell and destruction are before the Lord: how much more then the hearts of the children of men?"

King David addressed Israel and informed the people that his son, Solomon, would reign as king over the land. To Solomon, he advised:

And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imagina-

tions of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever (1 Chr. 28:9).

Those words of David sound very much like what New Testament Christians are told. The writer of Hebrews declares:

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do (Heb. 4:12-13).

### GOD KNOWS US

The Lord knows every event of our lives—whether past, present or future. He knows us to the very marrow of our bones. He knows the thoughts and intents of the heart.

#### *Abraham*

The Lord knew Abraham and how he would "command his children and his household after him," and how they would, "keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment" (Gen. 18:19). He knew Abraham when He gave him the charge to offer Isaac as a sacrifice upon one of the mountains of Moriah (Gen. 22).

#### *Moses*

The Lord knew Moses when he was but a babe. In His providence, He saw to it that he was saved from death. Moses became the great leader and law-giver of God's chosen people. His life and influence affected multiplied generations that followed. Moses' name is still revered unto this day.

#### *David*

The Lord knew young David and chose him to be king over Israel. Jesse's sons were brought before Samuel one by one. Samuel thought each time, this surely is the Lord's anointed. "But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). The Lord knew David, what he was made of,

what his judgments would be, and that he would exhibit the character of being one after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22).

### *Jeremiah*

The Lord knew Jeremiah even before he was born. The Lord said: "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations" (Jer. 1:5). Man cannot know such things! We cherish Jeremiah as the weeping prophet because of his great love for Israel.

### *The Woman At The Well*

The Lord knew the life of the woman at Jacob's well. He spoke of her five husbands, and yet, told her that the man she was with now was not her husband. The woman left her waterpot, went into the city and told the men: "Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" (Jn. 4:28-29).

### *Nathanael*

Jesus knew Nathanael before Philip brought him to see the Christ. Nathanael was amazed that Jesus spoke of him as if He knew him.

Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel (Jn. 1:48-49).

There is not even a sparrow that falls to the ground that escapes the notice of our Lord. He even knows the number of hairs on our head (Mt. 10:29-31; Lk. 12:6-7; cf. Ps. 50:11). The Lord said: "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" (Mt. 6:26). Such power and knowledge is too wonderful for us to fathom.

Seeing all these things, shall not the Lord know us as well? Yes, He does! We cannot escape His notice. Nothing about us is hidden from Him.

## **SIN CARRIES A PRICE**

People need to know and understand that sin has its consequences. There is a price that must be paid. The Bible clearly stresses: "For the

wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

The willingness for people to "buy now and pay later" seems to be a fair and agreeable deal. It works because we do not have to face the consequences today. We can enjoy the pleasure of what we want while we put out of our minds what it costs. Eventually though, its price catches up with us. By then, we are so far in debt we are overwhelmed by it. It consumes us. Sin is like that. Since we often do not have to pay for it immediately, it does not seem real to us that we will ever have to pay for it. But, pay for it we will! God is the one holding the note. He does not forget. He knows every single debt (sin) we have committed. He will not cancel the debt without payment.

"Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him" (Isa. 3:11). "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezek. 18:20). "[W]hen lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (Jas. 1:15). The payment due for our sins is death (Rom. 6:23). This is spiritual death—i.e., eternal separation from God.

But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death (Rev. 21:8).

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting (Gal. 6:7-8).

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

It is certain that the day will come,

... when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

### BE THANKFUL

What a blessing it is to be a child of God, to be among the saints, to be the household of God. We serve the righteous and holy God. “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” (Rom. 11:33).

His knowledge is perfect. His justice is fair. He knows and understands all that exists. Darkness and light are both alike unto Him. Oh, how thankful we should be that He knows all.

“For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Ecc. 12:14). There is coming a day “when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ” (Rom. 2:16). The Lord “searcheth the reins and hearts: and ... will give unto every one according to [their] works” (Rev. 2:23). The Lord our God is great in counsel and mighty in work. His eyes are open “upon all the ways of the sons of men: to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings” (Jer. 32:19).

We will not have to explain ourselves when we stand before Him in judgment. He already knows it all. We will not need to point out circumstances and situations we faced; and, because of such, we acted as we did. He will not have to be reminded of our friends and our enemies who helped us and/or hindered us along life’s way. He will not have to be informed of the difficulties and the obstacles we faced. He already knows. He does not forget. The things of darkness and the things of light are equally known by Him. His judgment is truly righteous—perfect in every way!

“[T]he Lord ... will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God” (1 Cor. 4:5). The Psalmist wrote: “I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies: for all my ways are before thee” (Ps. 119:168). “Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (Jn. 8:12).

Sometimes we are distraught because of the twists and turns of life. Sometimes we do not know where to turn. We do not know what to do with ourselves. We are greatly troubled with pressures that fall upon us. Sometimes our heart is heavy; especially so, when we think of our frailties, our weaknesses, our infirmities, our shortcomings. When we

are cast down, 1 John 3:20 should come to mind—"For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." These words are written to assure us of God's care. Though we do not have all the answers, we serve the God of heaven Who does. Though we cannot see a good ending of the situation before us, we know that the Lord will bring us through. He sees, He knows, He cares. His tender mercy is extended to His saints. Jesus looks upon us with love and compassion. If He loved the rich young ruler that walked away from Him (cf. Mk. 10:21), you know He loves His own. He will provide. He will prevail.

### CONCLUSION

Are you thankful for God's knowledge? His justice? His mercy? His loving kindness? What more could we ask from a loving, caring, benevolent, all-knowing, all-seeing God? Our privilege is to obey Him, and then live for Him today and every day. Obey the Gospel if you have not already done so.

*Believe* in the Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, the Savior of the world (Jn. 3:16; 8:24; Mk. 16:16). Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). All that we do that is of any benefit and reward of God is done *in* faith and *by* faith. Faith is the great work God has commanded us to do (Jn. 6:29).

*Repent* of your sins (Lk. 13:3, 5; Acts 2:38; 17:30). Make up your mind to turn away from wickedness. Set your affections on things above, not on the things of the earth (Col. 3:1-2). Live your life for the Savior, not yourself.

*Confess* faith in Jesus the Lord as the Son of God and Savior of the world (Mt. 10:32-33; Rom. 10:9-10). This is done not only in order to become a child of God, but is to be done every single day of the rest of our lives as we live according to His precepts and commandments. It is an ongoing process.

*Be Baptized*, immersed in water for the forgiveness of your sins (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21). There, you contact the blood of Christ that washes your sins away (Eph. 1:7; Rev. 1:5; Acts 22:16). At baptism you become a "new creature," a different person, in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Water baptism is the "new birth" we read about in John 3:3-5. Being raised from the watery grave of baptism, you begin a new walk in your new life with Christ (Rom. 6:4-6). "Being then

made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness” (Rom. 6:18).

*Be Faithful* unto Christ the rest of your life. “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58). Living faithful unto death, even in the very face of death, brings the favor of the Lord (Rev. 2:10), and the greatest of rewards in the end. Read, study, work, pray.

The Lord knows our heart. He knows our intent. We cannot fool Him. Why not genuinely obey the Lord today?

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are taken from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> Ruben Archer Torrey, *Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*, Psalm 139 (E-Sword).

<sup>3</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, Psalm 139 (E-Sword).

<sup>4</sup> John Wesley, *John Wesley’s Notes on the Old and New Testaments*, Psalm 139 (E-Sword).

<sup>5</sup> Matthew Poole, *Matthew Poole’s Commentary*, Psalm 139 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1985).

# “THERE SHALL BE NO NIGHT THERE”

*Rick Brumback*



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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

We sing of the joys and beauties of heaven—

How beautiful heaven must be  
Sweet home of the happy and free;  
Fair haven of rest for the weary,  
How beautiful heaven must be.<sup>2</sup>

We also sing of our expectation that heaven be our ultimate home

Some glad morning when this life is o'er  
I'll fly away.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, what shall heaven be like? Who shall abide there? Since Christian roots pervade our national history and identity, personal opinions about the answers to these and similar questions abound. What is needed, however, are answers that derive from God's self-revelation, the Scriptures. In this land of fadeless day in which no night will exist, what will the saved come to know personally and directly? This essay will explore the descriptions of the heavenly realm as found in the Bible.

## HEAVEN AS SEEN IN THE BIBLE

### *Heaven In The Scriptures*

As used in both the Old Testament and the New, the word “heaven” has multiple meanings; it may be employed to speak about either regions in the physical universe, or to speak about a spiritual realm.<sup>4</sup>

The context of the particular passage will determine which meaning is meant. In the created order, “heaven” is used in Genesis 1:6-8 to designate the open space above the earth which we call “sky.” It was within this region that the avian life God created on the fifth day flew (Gen. 1:21-23). The Bible text frequently speaks of this region, as in 1 Kings 18:45, where we read: “the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain.” In the days of the Old Testament prophet Haggai (ca. 520 B.C.), the people were told: “[T]he heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit” (Hag. 1:10).

Another use of “heaven” to describe the creation relates to the celestial realm of space—the cosmos. On the fourth day of creation, Yahweh said: “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years” (Gen. 1:14). These various lights were the sun, moon, stars, and other celestial bodies; Peter spoke of such when addressing the crowds on Pentecost (Acts 2:19). Frequently, there is little distinction made between these two uses referring to the created order, given that the difference is really just one of degree. In other words, the difference between talking about heaven (our atmosphere) and heaven (the reaches of space) is a matter of degree—how far from the earth.

The second use of “heaven,” and the more common in the New Testament, designates the spiritual abode of Yahweh—Jesus stated: “Our Father which art in heaven” (Mt. 6:9). This is of special interest to Christians, for not only are our petitions and our worship directed heavenward, but also heaven is the eventual and eternal home of the faithful. Hence the apostle could write that a Christian’s “conversation [citizenship-ASV] is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20).

#### *Reality Of Heaven*

Given the materialist outlook of contemporary culture, the latter meaning of “heaven”—designating the spiritual abode of God—is frequently denied even by theologians. Not surprisingly, such figures also deny the existence of a literal hell, the eternal abode of the unredeemed. What should we conclude? Is heaven (and hell) a reality, or is this a mythical construct from an ancient religion? The answer to such a question has a direct bearing upon our expectations as Christians.

Those who argue against the existence of a real heaven and hell, as described in the Bible, do so without support. There is no microscope nor telescope providing a glimpse into the metaphysical and spiritual realms. However, an examination of Christ's words does yield information about spiritual matters, and He and His spokesmen stated the following concerning heaven and hell:

And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell (Mt. 5:29).

[R]ather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Mt. 10:28).

[I]t is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched (Mk. 9:43-44).

Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power (2 Thess. 1:9).

And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15).

Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven (Mt. 10:32-33).

So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God (Mk. 16:19).

We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens (Heb. 8:1).

And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever (Rev. 22:4-5).

With these passages, it cannot be doubted that Jesus and His early disciples recognized the existence of both hell and heaven, as well as the moral and spiritual consequences that life on earth had upon the eternal destiny of the individual.

If the existence of hell is denied, then one must also recast the image of Satan and his workers as described in the Scriptures; they

must become allegorical or figurative in some manner. But, if Satan does not exist, with whom did Jesus battle in the wilderness (Mt. 4:1-11) and on the way to the cross (Gen. 3:15)? And if hell, with its denizens, is explained away, how does one know that hell's antithesis, heaven, has its own existence either? The same sources which promise eternal life in heaven for the faithful speak of the terrible consequences in hell of the unfaithful (Jn. 5:28-29; 2 Cor. 5:10). If one part of the Bible message is undone, the entire salvation story is affected. It all stands or falls together.

### DESCRIPTION OF HEAVEN

#### *Things Associated With Heaven*

What do the Scriptures tell us about the nature of heaven? A catalog of these elements becomes both useful and encouraging. First, only goodness and righteousness will reside in heaven. Peter wrote: "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Pet. 3:13). There are several implications of this statement. Since heaven is characterized by righteousness, all the best elements of existence will comprise the eternal abode of God's saved people. It will be the culmination and concentration of all those elements that truly bring bliss and joy to being.

Second, an entrance to heaven will encompass a reunion with the saved of all ages. Jesus spoke of those who would "come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 8:11). For those who have embraced the righteousness of Jehovah while they were on earth, their entrance into the eternal realm will be accompanied by the presence of all those who sought to live righteously throughout the ages. We expect to see the heroes of the faith mentioned in Hebrews 11, the figures of the New Testament who lived for Christ, and our own family members and friends who have been followers of Jesus the Christ. Furthermore, the greatest part of this heavenly reunion will be to reside in the presence of God and Jesus Himself. Thus, He promised to His disciples, and by extension to us: "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (Jn. 14:2-3). We know this extends to all the saved, not only because of the statement of Jesus

mentioned just above (Mt. 8:11), but because of the apostle's words concerning the return of Jesus—

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord (1 Thess. 4:14-17).

A third factor involved in the description of heaven is the presence of the heavenly host and the Godhead. Although we hinted at this in the preceding paragraph, a fuller picture of the divine presence should be given. When John the Beloved was given a glimpse into heavenly realities in the book of Revelation, he saw the majesty of the divine throne room. In chapters 4 and 5, the apostle describes what he witnessed in that scene. God sat upon His throne, a figure so splendid, and yet incapable of exact description, that John had to use references to precious stones and materials to begin verbalizing what he witnessed (Rev. 4:2-3). At this point it is helpful to point out that the human frame of reference for description centers upon the elements of our physical world. We have difficulty understanding that which is foreign to the elements of our own existence. Hence, John uses these material terms to explain what God is "like"—what else could he have comprehended and would his readers have found intelligible? So, in Revelation the descriptions of heavenly realities are made in comparison with the most precious items humans can appreciate from our own experiences and mental capacities.

When John saw the throne room, he also observed the Spirits of God, the twenty-four elders, and the four beasts worshipping God. Then the Son of God, the Lamb Christ, came into the room. The entire scene was one of adulation and worship, with the various creatures giving praise to the Godhead. Heaven will be a place in which the spiritual beings and the people of God bask in His presence and extend to Him continual praise and worship.

Another factor in describing heaven has to do with access to it for human beings. Simply stated, it is unreachable without Jesus the Christ.

He stated this in John 14:6—"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." There are several implications of this claim that should be explored. First, if no person can come to God except by Jesus, then His life's work and sacrifice must have value not only to Christians, but also to those who preceded Christianity, viz., the faithful of the patriarchal and Mosaical dispensations. In the Patriarchal Age, the fathers made sacrifice for their families to cover wrongdoing (see Job 1:4-5). Under the Israelitish religion, offerings of animals were made to cope with the sins of the people (see Lev. 4-5). However, none of these substitutions of animals could actually atone for the sins of humans—

For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect ... But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year (Heb. 10:1, 3).

It would be in the sacrifice of Christ at Golgotha that humanity's sin problem could be finally overcome; this is discussed in Hebrews 9:14-15. It may rightly be said that Christ opened the door to heaven for humanity.

Another implication of John 14:6 is that Christ has become the Originator or Founder of the possibility of reaching heaven. Prior to His advent and sacrificial work, salvation was not ultimately attainable. He authored salvation, meaning that no one can come to the Father and to heaven without the avenue afforded by Jesus. Therefore, the writer of Hebrews called Him "the captain [author, ASV] of ... salvation" (Heb. 2:10), and later wrote: "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb. 5:8-9).

Finally, John 14:6 indicates that, in contrast to the spirit of pluralism and ecumenism that pervades our age, only Christ makes heaven attainable for the people of the world. Clearly this is not in keeping with the spirit of the age in which diversity finds itself championed in religious thought. The New Testament, properly read, would be considered too narrow and provincial by many of our time. Yet, Peter knew the significance of John 14:6 and its relation to heaven, taking his opportunity to declare this truth among nay-sayers of his own day, saying: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none

other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). If we believe that Jesus came from heaven as the Word made flesh (Jn. 1:14), and if we believe that He knows the way back, then we are compelled to accept His claims about the opportunity to reach heaven offered uniquely by Him. We may say that while there exist many "world religions," today only Christianity is "God's religion."

A final descriptor of heaven may be cataloged, one developed in relation to Israelite history and representing a typological fulfillment of that history. When the Hebrews exited Egypt, they did so under the aegis not only of God's immediate care, but also of God's long-established promise to bring Abraham's descendants to reside in the land of Canaan (Gen. 15:13-16). Though their journey across the Sinai peninsula from Egypt to Canaan lasted many decades—due to that current generation's faithless response to Yahweh—when they finally crossed the Jordan river and took the land, they were able to experience rest in their "promised land" (Josh. 21:43-44). That rest, however, was not the final resting place spoken of to the Jews, because through the mouth of King David, the Lord reminded His people that there was a superior rest still waiting to be experienced (Ps. 95:6-11). The author of Hebrews drew upon these facts to try and convince those Jews abandoning Christianity to reconsider the consequences of their decisions—if they did not remain true to Christ, they could not experience the final rest that had been promised to an Israel already settled in Canaan.

For if Joshua<sup>5</sup> had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God ... Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief (Heb. 4:8-9, 11).

Heaven constitutes that final rest toward which the people of God are marching. When Jesus issued His great invitation, "Come unto me" (Mt. 11:28), He not only offered a rest from false religion and from sin, but also included was the ultimate rest of departing a sin-touched world, sloughing off the mortal body, and entering the courts of heaven in rest and relief. Paul encouraged the afflicted brethren at Thessalonica by calling their thoughts to that promised rest that would begin when Jesus returned for His people (2 Thess. 1:6-10).

*Things Excluded From Heaven*

Precisely because a description of heaven involves a number of particular features that distinguish it, there exists a list of elements that will not be found in heaven or associated with life there. It behooves us to identify and reflect upon these excluded features.

Since heaven can only be accessed by means of the grace afforded through Jesus, those who have not availed themselves of this grace and forgiveness will not be found in heaven. In other words, people who are not saved, who are not Christians, who are not God's faithful children, will not be found in heaven. Such figures still bear their own sins, sins which separate them from God and prevent the peaceful relation they might otherwise have through Christ.

Closely related is the fact that sin and evil will not have a presence in heaven. The devil and all his associates will have their part in the lake of fire, along with those whose names are not written in the book of life (Rev. 20:15); all these will bear their own sins away with them. When Peter wrote that heaven is a place of righteousness (2 Pet. 3:13), this meant that nothing evil or sinful would be tolerated, and human beings will not be allowed to carry their sins with them and enter the promised rest. Heaven will not be despoiled by the presence of evil.

Heaven is not the realm of second chances. The earthly life affords the opportunity to show that God matters to us and that we wish to serve Him freely. As Paul noted, when the end of time comes: "[W]e must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). There is no reincarnation (Heb. 9:27), and there will be no second chance to find grace when this life has come to a close. This is why Jesus warned so frequently about making the right choice to follow Him while the opportunity was still available. Consider all the parables and warnings that convey this message (see e.g., Mt. 24:36-25:46). If heaven consisted of second chances, why would a person expect to be any different than he was on earth with its second chances? Instead, heaven is for those who love God and have centered their lives on Him through Christ.

Those elements which make life so difficult will not be present in the land of God. Even while the inward man, the spiritual aspect of human existence made alive through the Messiah, can be renewed day by day, the physical aspect continues its degradation as each human body gives way to the limitations of mortality (2 Cor. 4:16-5:4).

Solomon summarized the time when the human figure would be stooped with age, strength would flee, and life come to a close (Ecc. 12:1-7). Joshua could well say he was going "the way of all the earth" (Josh. 23:14). But the elements of mortality—the failing health, the aches and pains, the weariness—will be absent in heaven. This is why John says: "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:4). The tears shed, either due to the frailties of the human condition or the presence of sin and evil, will be gone completely from the heavenly home. Sorrows and sadness will be removed, replaced by joy and gladness. Christians will take possession of that glorious body "fashioned like unto his glorious body" (Phil. 3:21), a body entirely suited to the immortal realm (1 Cor. 15:36-58).

One of the most famous statements about this subject is found in Revelation 21:25—"for there shall be no night there." Throughout Scripture the binaries of light/dark, day/night are used to speak of moral categories of good and evil as well as knowledge (and understanding) and ignorance (and misunderstanding). With regard to heaven, we have already observed that only goodness will be present; evil and the practitioners thereof will be banished to the lake of fire. God Himself, the fount of goodness, will keep all sin and iniquity from His spiritual realm. But since light and dark also speak of knowledge, heaven is seen as a place in which understanding and full appreciation of the scheme of redemption can take place. We may recall the words of Peter stating that those of previous ages may have served the needs of emerging Christianity while not understanding what they were promoting (2 Pet. 1:10-12), but clarity for them will emerge in heaven. Paul mentioned that upon our entrance into heaven, the life we lived by faith, that is, by confidence in the Scriptures' message, will become sight, that is, will take on full experiential awareness and knowledge for us—we will know heaven and the presence of God first-hand (2 Cor. 5:7-10). Heaven and all that pertains to its setting will constitute the fulfillment and culmination of all that God had set in motion for the deliverance of the human soul.

### CONCLUSION

Echoing the words of the Savior Himself (Jn. 14:1-3), we may accurately describe heaven as a prepared place for a prepared people.

The abode of God will become the abode of His followers when time comes to a close, when the scheme of redemption and salvation of obedient people is consummated, and when “the faith” becomes “sight.” At that moment, every person will *want* to hear their names spoken in love and acceptance as they are welcomed by the Lord into the shores of glory. Such an end is promised to those who have been cleansed from their sins by the shed blood of the Christ and who have walked steadfastly in the Lord’s service. Peter describes the transition to this heavenly kingdom by saying: “For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:11). The preparations for the heavenly home have already been made. What is to be determined by each individual is whether he will embrace the teachings of the Gospel and begin to shape his own life to harmonize with God’s divine plan. Long ago, the prophet Balaam uttered: “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!” (Num. 23:10). In order to have the reward of the righteous in heaven, one must be willing to live the life of the righteous on earth. Then, the land of fadeless day will become the home of the soul.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are taken from the King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> A.S. Bridgewater and A.P. Bland, “How Beautiful Heaven Must Be,” in *Hymns for Worship*, eds. R.J. Stevens and Dane K. Shepherd, rev. ed. (Bowling Green, KY: Guardian of Truth Foundation, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Albert E. Brumley, “I’ll Fly Away,” in *Hymns for Worship*, eds. R.J. Stevens and Dane K. Shepherd, rev. ed. (Bowling Green, KY: Guardian of Truth Foundation, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), 5:497.

<sup>5</sup> The names “Joshua” in Hebrew and “Jesus” in Greek are equivalent names. The translators of the King James Version used the name “Jesus,” but the context of Hebrews 4 clearly indicates that our passage is not referencing the Son of Mary, but rather the successor to Moses. Hence I have employed the name “Joshua” in the main text.

# “THY WORD IS ... A LIGHT UNTO MY PATH”

*Josh Romo*



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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

The Word of God has blessed mankind richly. Within the pages of the Bible we read of the creation of man, the fall of man, God's promise to redeem mankind through a Savior, Jesus the Christ being born, His suffering, dying and rising again so that we might be reconciled to our great and glorious God! Concerning God's Word, someone wrote:

This Book contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe and practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveler's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword and the Christian's charter. Here paradise is restored, heaven opened and the gates of hell disclosed. Christ is its grand object, our good its design and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet. Read it slowly, frequently, and prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory, and a river of pleasure. It is given you in life, will be opened in the judgement, and will be remembered forever. It involves the highest responsibility, will reward the greatest labour, and will condemn all who trifle with its sacred contents.<sup>2</sup>

There is no other book like it. It is the only book which can say of itself: "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than

any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” (Heb. 4:12). In other words, it is alive! What other book could claim to have a pertinent message nearly two thousand years after its writing was completed? *None!*

The Word of God is indeed a light unto the path of the Christian. There is no other way by which a man can know God’s will. There is no other way by which a man can come to the knowledge of the Savior, whom the apostle John describes as: “[T]he light of men” (Jn. 1:4). Because God’s Word is the only way that a man can come to the knowledge of Jesus the Christ, there is no other way by which he can know what he must do in order to receive the salvation of the Lord.

As Christians, we have entrusted to us a gem that is more precious than even the most valuable diamond or ruby. We have the Gospel of life; the Word of Christ; the very mind of God within our hands! When we hold it, we hold a light that will guide us down the pathways of life, if we allow it to do so. In order for the Word of God to be a light unto a man’s path, he must open it, read it, study it, and apply it. When one does that, then and only then will he truly be able to follow the “paths of righteousness” (Ps. 23:3), and “walk in the light, as [Christ] is in the light” (1 Jn. 1:7).

#### **LEFT TO HIMSELF, MAN IS LOST AND CANNOT DIRECT HIS STEPS**

If the Word of God is a “light unto my path” (Ps. 119:105), then without God’s Word there is no light. If there is no light, we cannot see. If we cannot see, we are lost and have no hope! Left to himself, man is hopelessly lost and without any spiritual direction. Jeremiah expresses this thought in a very “matter of fact” manner, saying: “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). This is one of the most profound statements made in Scripture. About this statement, Coffman writes: “As long as men seek to be guided by their own counsels, and by what seems good to them, they are destined to frustration and defeat.”<sup>3</sup> Israel experienced this firsthand. Israel had tried to direct its own steps for quite some time without the direction that God offered them. “In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Jgs. 17:6). There was no reason for the Israelites to do what was right in their own eyes—they had the law given to them

by God through Moses. They were commanded to do that which was right in the eyes of God, not what was right in their own eyes! They had every opportunity to do what was right, yet they decided that the Word of God was not for them. The book of Judges is also known as the "book of failures." The reason for those failures recorded in that book is that the Israelites ignored the Word of the Lord. Their rebellion and ignorance of the Lord's Word ultimately led to their captivity and being taken into Babylon.

Time and again throughout the annals of history, when man has left the Word of God to follow his own counsel, he has found himself in utter darkness. Clarkson says:

The essence of sin is self-will. The first sin was an act of disobedience. All wickedness is a rebellion against a supreme authority. Man is not free to live to himself, swayed only by his own lawless caprice. He has a vocation to fulfill: 1. He has no *right* to go his own way. He is a servant. He is lawfully subject to a righteous Lord, before whom duty requires him to say, "Not my will, but thine, be done." 2. He has not *light* enough to direct his own steps. Future accidents cannot be anticipated. The ultimate effects of the simplest action are not to be traced beforehand. Hence the need of a higher direction. 3. He has not *power* to succeed in his own way. If he starts by himself, making the awful experiment of a self-sustained pilgrimage through the toils and storms of life, he will assuredly make shipwreck. Our duty is not to live for self, nor even for God in our own way or by our own unaided strength, but to do his will, in his way, by his aid.<sup>4</sup>

God made man a free moral agent. That is, man can choose whether or not he will follow the law of God. However, if man chooses not to follow the Word of the Lord, he must be prepared to bear the consequences. Adam was expelled from Eden and separated from the Tree of Life because he chose to go his own way (Gen. 3:23-24). Moses was not allowed to enter the promised land because he chose not to glorify and sanctify God before the people of Israel (Num. 20:12). The sword never departed from the house of David because of his choice to disregard God's law (2 Sam. 12:10). Judas is said to have gone to his "own place" because of his transgression in betraying the Lord and Savior of mankind (Acts 1:25). Herod was "eaten of worms" because "he gave not God the glory" (Acts 12:23).

Perhaps, the greatest example of man trying to follow a path without the light of God's Word is Solomon. As we read of the life of the wisest man who ever lived, except for Christ, we are surprised at his foolishness. Here was a man who married hundreds of women and then built altars to their gods! How foolish can a wise man be? He tried everything "under the sun" (a phrase found 29 times in the book of Ecclesiastes) to find happiness. Near the end of his life, writing his great book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon's conclusion to the "whole matter" of life is: "Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecc. 12:13). Solomon is a great example for us to consider because he started out on the right path, the path of light. Then, unfortunately, he changed his course by deciding to walk the pathway of darkness, seeking to go his own way without God. After having done so, Solomon wisely concluded that the *whole* of man is to fear God and keep His commands. He tried both ways and, as the wise man that he was, he tells us that the best thing a man can do is follow the Word of God! As Young expresses it:

The man who insists that he can make his own way only finds it will perish at last. Because no way can be considered just as a way; whether it is pleasant or painful, easy or difficult, is not the great matter, but whither it leads, what lies at the end of it. As it would be foolish for a man to take charge of a ship, ignorant of his destination and how to reach it, so it is equally foolish for a man to suppose that any way will do so long as it is as comfortable and easy as he can make it. Man's right way must be according to God's clear will.<sup>5</sup>

The way of man is not in himself. Man cannot save himself. It is God's Word that shows the way to salvation!

#### **THE WORD OF GOD IS AN OBJECTIVE LAW**

"Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34). The Jews, Israelites, had long believed that they were especially favored by God and that salvation was theirs alone. As is recorded by Luke, in Acts 10, Peter learns a valuable lesson concerning the Gospel of Christ—it is for *all* nations! Christ told His disciples: "Go ye therefore, and teach *all* nations" (Mt. 28:19, emphasis added)! Concerning His Word, Jesus also said: "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (Jn. 12:48). If the Word of Jesus, therefore the Word of

God (Jn. 1:1), is going to judge those who reject that Word, it must be determined: “To whom does His Word apply?” Does Christ’s Word apply to a single race or to all races? According to the Scriptures, the Word of God is not meant for only one race of people, but for all of mankind! On Judgment Day, all mankind will be judged by God’s Law.

The Word of God, because it comes from God and not man, is an objective law. Furthermore, it is binding upon *all* of mankind, not only a select few. The Proverbs writer says: “For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life” (Pro. 6:23). God’s Word provides instruction and correction for all men. Regarding those who have obeyed God’s Word, Paul says: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). Thus, it is obvious that regardless of a person’s race, social status, and sex, he or she must obey the commandments of God!

When we consider the laws that have been established in the kingdoms of men, it is obvious that none of those laws are set forth as a universal objective standard! The laws made by any particular country or kingdom apply only to its citizens. For example, as citizens of United States—if we are not in England—we are not amenable to the laws of England. Likewise, citizens of England—if they are not in the United States—are not amenable to the laws of the United States. As long as a citizen of the United States remains within the borders of United States, he is subject to her laws and none others. On the other hand, God’s law, His Word, is truly a universal law, objective in its nature, to which all men are amenable! As such, all men have the obligation to obey it. In obeying it, Christians have the duty of taking it to “all nations.”

Since all men are subject to the Law of God, one may logically conclude that salvation is offered to all men. Jude writes: “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation” (Ju. 3). The Greek word for “common” is *koinos*, which literally means “shared by all.”<sup>6</sup> Their race and sex did not matter, all who obeyed the law of Christ shared salvation. The same is true today. Unless a man hears the Word of God, he cannot inherit eternal life. Let us be diligent in spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ to our families, our friends, our communities, and the world. The “Great Commission” was initially given to eleven men. In carrying it out, they were to pass that commission on to others who would be faithful in teaching yet others (Mt.

28:19-20; 2 Tim. 2:2). This means that we are responsible for reaching lost souls in the world with the Gospel of Christ today.

Peter says: “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). In the same vein, Paul declares that God “... will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). From these two verses we learn that God wants all men, everywhere to come to the knowledge of the truth. Again, this demonstrates that the Word of God is an objective law unto which all are amenable. Let us then take the Word of the Lord to the world!

### **GOD’S WORD IS BOTH LAMP AND LIGHT**

The Word of God is described in many different ways. It is described as: “pure” (Ps. 119:140), “truth” (Jn. 17:17), “milk” (1 Pet. 2:2), “meat” (Heb. 5:12), *et cetera*. Here, we are concerned with the Word of God being described as a “lamp” and a “light.” Psalm 119:105 states: “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” In the same chapter, verse 130, we again see that God’s Word is referred to as a “light.” Recall: “For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life” (Pro. 6:23).

#### *How Is God’s Word A Lamp?*

The word “lamp” could refer to several different instruments. We might think of this word as a lantern or torch.<sup>7</sup> In either case, it is used to give off a guiding light. A lamp would be filled with oil, a wick inserted, and then the wick would be lit. It could then be used to help light a room or carried to light one’s path.

Note, the “commandment is a lamp” (Pro. 6:23). “Lamp” there refers to a particular light, like that of a candle. The “commandment” is “any particular commandment which harmonizes with God’s will, and commands what is to be done and forbids what is to be left undone.”<sup>8</sup> Hence, the “lamp” here refers to the specific commands of God’s Word. After all, the commands given in the Word of the Lord are what guide us in our worship, our conduct, and our words. Without the commandments of God, we would have no direction.

#### *How Is God’s Word A Light?*

While the “lamp” refers to a specific source of light, the “light,” as used in these passages, refers to the entirety of God’s Word. The word

"light," in the passages with which we are dealing, is used of light in general, such as the light of the day and the sun.<sup>9</sup> The light comes from God and makes man's way clear before him. The word "light" is used to signify, "moral truth, and preeminently that divine system of truth which is set forth in the Bible"<sup>10</sup> The light given to man by means of God's Word is general in the sense that it allows him to see where he should go and what he should be in every area of his life. Referring to God's Word, Henry writes:

It must be not only a light to our eyes, to gratify them, and fill our heads with speculations, but a light to our feet and to our path, to direct us in the right ordering of our conversation, both in the choice of our way in general and in the particular steps we take in that way, that we may not take a false way nor a false step in the right way.<sup>11</sup>

Another way the word "light" is used is to signify the "edicts, laws, rules, or directions that proceed from ruling powers for the good of their subjects."<sup>12</sup> Hence, it can be seen that the "edicts, laws, rules, and directions" we read in the Bible are for the benefit of all those that would be guided by God.

#### *Lamp And Light*

At this point, let us consider the two together. The Word of God has "counsel for every difficulty, comfort in every trouble, guidance in all perplexity."<sup>13</sup> They, the "lamp" and "light," direct and reveal the true way of faith and life. In reference to Psalm 119:105, Coffman comments: "The word of God is the Light of Life, a lamp; and the psalmist's pilgrimage through life is under the guidance of God's teachings. He thus vows to follow the light wherever it may lead and whatever dangers may be involved."<sup>14</sup> The "lamp" and "light" represent the Word of God in its entirety, both the specific commands and the general guidance given by it.

The words found in Psalm 119:105 are a wonderful summation of what the Word of God means to the Christian. His Word should guide us in all that we do. As Christians, we should never be without the light given by the Holy Word of God. Expounding upon this passage, Spurgeon says:

Each man should use the word of God personally, practically, and habitually, that he may see his way and see what lies in it. When darkness settles down upon all around me, the word of the

Lord, like a flaming torch, reveals my way. Having no fixed lamps in eastern towns, in old time each passenger carried a lantern with him that he might not fall into the open sewer, or stumble over the heaps of ordure which defiled the road. This is a true picture of our path through this dark world, we should not know the way, or how to walk in it, if the Scripture, like a blazing flambeau, did not reveal it. One of the most practical benefits of Holy Writ is guidance in the acts of daily life; it is not sent to astound us with its brilliance, but to guide us by its instruction. It is true the head needs illumination, but even more the feet need direction, else head and feet may both fall into a ditch. Happy is the man who personally appropriates God's word, and practically uses it as his comfort and counsellor,—a lamp to his own feet. “*And a light unto my path.*” It is a lamp by night, a light by day, and a delight at all times. David guided his own steps by it, and also saw the difficulties of his road by its beams. He who walks in darkness is sure, sooner or later, to stumble; while he who walks by the light of day, or by the lamp of night, stumbleth not, but keeps his uprightness.<sup>15</sup>

We must take the Word, keep it always, and bring it to bear upon the path we are to take. “Many turn the light of the Word skywards, or backwards, or on the right hand or left. Hold it down on your path.”<sup>16</sup> Let the Word of God light your path and lead you on the pathway of life!

### **GOD'S WORD CAN KEEP ONE FROM THE “DANGERS OF EVIL” AND “RIGHT WITH HIM”**

God has always wanted what was best for His creation. From the very beginning, when God created Adam and Eve and set them in the Garden of Eden, God's law was meant to keep man from harm. If God's precepts and commands are followed and obeyed, man can be kept from the *dangers of evil* and be made confident that he is *right with Him*.

John tells us that as Christians we must “walk in the light, as he is in the light” (1 Jn. 1:7). We must, says Peter: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). Notice that Satan is described as a “roaring lion.” If we will “walk in the light” of God's Word, being “sober” and “vigilant” in carrying out God's will, we can be assured that Satan will not be able to sneak up on us! It would appear that the only thing a “roaring lion” could ever catch and hold

within its grips is an animal that is extremely slow, crippled, cannot run, or is deaf! If the Word of God is not an integral part of our lives, then we are spiritually crippled, spiritually deaf, or both! Spiritual death is the ultimate end for those who are spiritually crippled or spiritually deaf if they do not change and become obedient to the Lord.

The latter part of Proverbs 6:23 speaks of “reproofs” being the “way of life.” These “reproofs” are disciplinary, and their purpose is to discipline one’s soul. In other words, God provides correction for His followers in His Word. The “reproofs of instruction” refer to “that instruction which reproves us for our sins and errors,” thus leading us into the way of life.<sup>17</sup>

The Psalmist wrote: “The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple” (Ps. 119:130). The word translated as “entrance” here is literally, “opening.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, when God’s Word is opened and the knowledge contained within it is imparted to the individual through study and practice, its light is shed upon one’s path. The latter part of the passage says “it giveth understanding unto the simple.” The Word of God not only gives knowledge, it gives understanding. The word rendered “simple” here literally means “seducible” or, in other words, easily persuaded. Therefore, even the simple of heart are given understanding by the Word of God and are able to be led by the light of God’s Word. Spurgeon eloquently states: “Those whom the world dubs as fools are among the truly wise if they are taught of God. What a divine power rests in the word of God, since it not only bestows light, but gives that very mental eye by which the light is received.”<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, the Word of God is able to keep man from the *dangers of evil* and *right with Him*, if only man will allow it to do so. In referring to God’s Word as a “lamp” and “light,” the Psalmist tells us exactly how His Word is that. Think about trying to get from point “A” to point “B” on an extremely dark night. On this night there is a new moon, a thick cloud cover, and absolutely no light from the heavens. The path upon which you must travel is far from city lights or lights from any source and winds its way through places fraught with danger on every side. How do you get from point “A” to point “B” without a light of any sort? The answer is: “You cannot!” The illumination the Word of God provides—revealing the path we must walk as we travel through this world—is invaluable. The light showing our path allows us to see and avoid the obstacles that might be in our way. Without the light, we

would constantly be stumbling about in the dark, apt to fall into a ditch. Without the light, we would be more susceptible to attack by the agents of Satan. Without the light, we might become wounded as we stumble along our path and be overtaken by the “roaring lion.”

Immediately prior to his description of the armor God provides for every Christian—and every Christian is a soldier in the Lord’s army—Paul instructs: “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:11). We are able to put on that armor only by equipping and enabling ourselves with God’s Word. Every item of the Christians’ armor, i.e., “the whole armour of God,” is inseparately dependent upon the Word of God. How else are we to be able to withstand the “wiles” of Satan? We would not know of Satan’s tactics save for God’s Word! It is through the Bible that we learn of our enemy, his devious tactics and approaches in his unholy warfare, and who his allies are. When we learn of his lying and deceiving ways, we are better able to defend ourselves against the *dangers of evil*.

Just as God’s Word protects us from evil, it keeps us *right with Him*. We are right with God when we obey His law. When we understand that His “law is light,” and that to continue in a right relationship with God is to continue in His “light,” we will then understand that to “walk in the light, as he is in the light” means to keep the commandments of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Jesus said: “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (Jn. 14:15). Furthermore, if we remain in God’s light, “the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 Jn. 1:7). It is the remission of sin obtained through baptism that puts us into that right relationship with God in the first place (Acts 2:38). Then, we must remain in His light to have the continual washing of the blood of Jesus Christ our Lord. It is only through His Word that man can avoid the *dangers of evil* and stay *right with Him*.

#### **CHRISTIANS MUST BE GUIDED BY A “THUS SAITH THE LORD”**

Sadly, as we look at the religious world today, the overwhelming majority of those who claim to be Christians are following after the traditions of men rather than the Word of the Lord. Jesus confronted this problem “head-on” with the Pharisees. Matthew records:

Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men (Mt. 15:1-9).

It is important to the welfare of one's soul that he be guided by a “*thus saith the Lord*”—not by some creed or what some *man* has said or written. We will not be judged on that last day by the creeds, manuals, disciplines, catechisms, or anything else produced by uninspired mortal men. God's sole standard of judgment on that day will be His Word spoken and delivered by Christ (Jn. 12:48-50)! The traditions and commandments of men will take souls to hell, not to heaven.

From the works of Benjamin Franklin, Leroy Brownlow quotes:

First, any creed containing more than the Bible is objectionable, because it does contain more than the Bible. Second, any creed containing less than the Bible is objectionable, because it does contain less than the Bible. Third, any creed differing from the Bible is objectionable, because it does differ from the Bible. Fourth, any creed precisely like the Bible is useless, because we have the Bible. This covers the whole ground. There can be no other thought of. A creed must contain more than the Bible, less than the Bible, differ from it, or be precisely like it. No man defends his creed on the ground that it contains more than the Bible, less than the Bible, that it is different from the Bible, or precisely like it. If a creed be not defended on some of these grounds, on what ground can it be defended? Certainly on no ground conceivable to mortal man.<sup>20</sup>

It is the Bible that completely furnishes us to every good work. Paul writes: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Since the Bible is inspired by God, and is to be used “for reproof, for correction, for instruction,” what else does man need? Peter says: “According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue” (2 Pet. 1:3). God has given us *everything* we need. We need no man made creeds, doctrines, or traditions. *Everything* we need is found in the Word of God!

Man, if he wants to receive salvation of the Lord, ought to seek out what it is the Lord wants from him. The phrase, “thus saith the Lord,” appears in the Bible in 413 verses! That means the Lord decided to make His will known to man on at least four hundred thirteen occasions! If we want to know what it is that God wants us to do, we need do nothing more than turn to the pages of His Holy Word! Another phrase used quite often in Scripture is “the word of the Lord.” This phrase is used by the inspired writers in 255 verses in describing what the Lord demands of His people. This makes a total of 668 times that the Lord expressly states that He is revealing His will to man; and, He has had them all recorded for us. It was God Who sent the Christ to suffer and die for us. It was Christ Who said His Word would judge us in the last day (Jn. 12:48). By shedding His blood, He ordained a better covenant (Heb. 9). When the God of Heaven speaks, man most certainly ought to listen.

Paul commands: “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Col. 3:17). Here, Paul teaches that if we do not have a “thus saith the Lord” for what we say and do, then we do not have the authority to say or do it! Whatever we do in this life, including our worship, should be authorized by a “thus saith the Lord.” Period—that is the end of the matter! John warns: “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son” (2 Jn. 9). The phrase, “Whosoever transgresseth,” in the American Standard Version (1901), reads: “Whosoever goeth onward.” Clearly, the meaning is that those who do go beyond the Word of God, i.e., those who “abideth not” in (do not make their dwelling in) the teachings of Christ do not have God. They are lost! On the other hand, those who do “abideth in” (make their dwelling in) the teachings of Christ have “both the Father and the Son.” The logical conclusion is that if we want to have

fellowship with God, we must not go beyond what Christ has authorized in His Word.

Regarding the Psalmist's words, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Ps. 119:105), it must be understood that the only way God's Word can be that "lamp" and "light" is for that "Word" to be used correctly. As noted earlier, the light afforded by God's Word does not shine outside the path of God's righteousness, except to expose the ways man should not follow. In other words, one receives no good benefit from God's Word if it is wrongfully used (2 Pet. 3:16). In 2 Timothy 2:15, we read: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." "Rightly dividing the word of truth" means that it must be correctly interpreted, understood, used, and taught. Only in this way is the only path to Heaven illuminated by God's Word.

#### CONCLUSION

The Word of God offers many wonderful benefits to mankind. It can spiritually feed and fulfill every need of our souls. It can correct our steps when we falter. It can prepare us for Judgment Day by letting us know how to be saved and by what standard we will be judged. Truly, God's Word is a great blessing to mankind because of the eternal light it beams which leads to eternal life. Without the Word of God, man is lost in a world of darkness. Without the Word of God, man has no means to find his way. The way of man is not now, nor has it ever been, in himself. Man cannot direct his own steps; his steps must be directed by the light of God's Word. The Word of the Lord is a law which applies to all mankind. God's Word is both "lamp" and "light" to show man the path of righteousness. By following the light of the Word, man can avoid the *dangers of evil* and maintain a right relationship with God. The Lord speaks to us today, but He only speaks through His written Word, more specifically through the New Testament. Because this is so, every Christian must be guided by that Word. May we, by its application to our lives, with the Psalmist say: "Thy word is ... a light unto my path!"

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are taken from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> “Quotations on Bible Study,”  
<<http://www.bible-researcher.com/hermeneutics2.html>> Accessed 29 June 2010.

<sup>3</sup> James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on Jeremiah of the Major Prophets* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 1990), 130.

<sup>4</sup> W. Clarkson, “Jeremiah,” *The Pulpit Commentary*, ed. H.D. Spence and Joseph S. Exell (New York, NY: J.J. Little and Ives Co., n.d.), 273.

<sup>5</sup> D. Young, “Jeremiah,” *The Pulpit Commentary*, 291.

<sup>6</sup> James Strong, “koinos,” *The New Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), Greek Dictionary of the New Testament, 141.

<sup>7</sup> John McClintock and James Strong, “Lamp,” *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), 5:220.

<sup>8</sup> W.J. Deane and S.T. Taylor-Taswell, “Proverbs,” *The Pulpit Commentary*, 133.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> McClintock and Strong, “Light,” 5:425.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew Henry, “Psalm 119,” *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* <<http://mhcw.biblecommenter.com/psalms/119.htm>>

<sup>12</sup> McClintock and Strong, Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> S. Conway, “Psalms,” *The Pulpit Commentary*, 135.

<sup>14</sup> James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on Psalms*, (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 1992), 377.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, Psalm 119:105, E-Sword.

<sup>16</sup> S. Conway, “Psalms,” *The Pulpit Commentary*, 135.

<sup>17</sup> Adam Clarke, *Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Bible*, Proverbs, E-Sword.

<sup>18</sup> James Strong, “pethach,” Hebrew and Aramaic Dictionary, 233.

<sup>19</sup> Spurgeon, Psalm 119:130.

<sup>20</sup> Leroy Brownlow, *Why I am a Member of the Church of Christ*, (Fort Worth, TX: Brownlow Publishing Company, Inc., 1973), 47-48.

# “THE CHILDREN OF LIGHT”

*Devin Dean*



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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

“Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness” (1 Thess. 5:5). What greater metaphor could be used to describe the difference between right and wrong, good and evil, and God and Satan? Darkness has been, and always will be, a thing associated with fear and evil. Why is it that crime happens mostly at night? Why is it that security lights are installed to remove the darkness? Why is it that many children desire a light to comfort them at night? What do “creatures of the night” do when exposed to light? Night and day, darkness and light, cannot coexist; they are mutually exclusive. God uses this principle to show the stark contrast between those who are His children and those who are Satan’s children. In this chapter, the children of light are explored in three main areas:

- I. THE SOURCE IS LIGHT—THE CHILDREN OF LIGHT ARE SHINED ON
- II. THE SALVATION IS LIGHT—THE CHILDREN OF LIGHT ARE SHINED IN
- III. THE SERVICE IS LIGHT—THE CHILDREN OF LIGHT ARE SHINING OUT

### **THE SOURCE IS LIGHT— THE CHILDREN OF LIGHT ARE SHINED ON**

1 Thessalonians 5:5 gives four terms for us to examine: 1) The children of light, 2) the children of the day, 3) the night, and 4) darkness. What do these terms mean? What are the distinctions of these terms? Said another way, why did Paul say what he said? First, the

principle of light being divided from darkness—that darkness and light cannot coexist—is as old as the earth itself. Moses said:

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day (Gen. 1:1-5).

Second, this physical truth—darkness and light cannot coexist—was used by John to describe the arrival and mission of the Christ, giving a spiritual definition to light and darkness. John stated:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world (Jn. 1:1-9).

Christ is that true Light, and He is the life of men (Jn. 14:6). The children of light are “of light” because He is the Light “which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.” Verifying the interpretation and usage of the creation of light to the introduction of the true Light, Paul penned:

[T]he god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them ... For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:4, 6).

Paul used the terms “children of light” and “children of the day” because our source is the true Light.

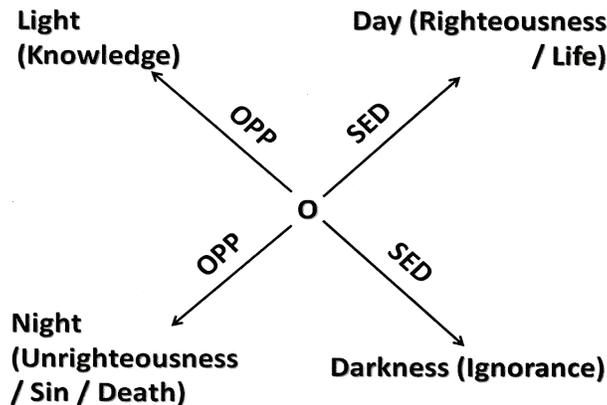
Does Paul’s repetition of terms have any significance? Why did Paul use both “the children of light” (that one is obvious, we belong to the Light) and “the children of the day”? Robertson, citing Deissmann,

indicates that it is a “Hebraism.”<sup>2</sup> Explaining the literary nature of a “Hebraism,” Wanamaker illustrates: “The combination of ‘son of’ used in a figurative sense with a descriptive or possessive genitive is a Hebraism (see BDF §162.6; Turner, *Syntax*, 207f.) reflective of a patriarchal society.”<sup>3</sup> The *Pulpit Commentary* summarizes this particular line of reasoning with its comment:

Ver. 5.—*Ye are all the children of the light, and the children of the day.* Hebraistic expressions denoting, Ye all belong to the light and to the day. An affirmation, strengthening the previous declaration. The light and the day are synonymous expressions—the day being the period of light, as opposed to the night and darkness. *We are not of the night, nor of darkness;* rendering the positive assertion more emphatic.<sup>4</sup>

Wanamaker brings forth the most important thought one can have in an approach to Scripture, saying: “The association of light with day makes the connection of the two in v. 5 a natural one, but the metaphor ‘sons of the day’ in the context cannot be divorced from the theme of the passage, the day of the Lord.”<sup>5</sup> Paul began the context under discussion at 1 Thessalonians 4:13. “[T]he day of the Lord” (1 Thess. 5:2) is coming. Those who are “the children of light”—those who follow the true Light—are also “the children of the day”—they are prepared for the coming “day of the Lord.” Their preparation means that “the day of the Lord” will not come upon them as it does the world. Where “the day of the Lord” will mean death and destruction for the world, it means life and liberty for the child of God.

Melson’s chart shows the distinctions and differences in Paul’s usage of these terms:<sup>6</sup>



With this knowledge, the “children of light” are to live as “the children of the day”—in a constant state of readiness, prepared for the Lord’s return. Thus, they will not be as those of darkness, those who live in the night destined for eternal night (Mt. 25:30).

The children of light are the children of the day. They understand the meaning of the Lord’s statement: “I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness” (Jn. 12:46). Furthermore, they comprehend His offer: “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (Jn. 8:12). He is their *source*, He is the true Light, and they are His children.

#### **THE SALVATION IS LIGHT— THE CHILDREN OF LIGHT ARE SHINED IN**

How does the Source that shines upon all men become “the life” to the children of light? The Source gave Paul a mission to the Gentiles and all men. That mission was “to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive remission of sins and an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in me” (Acts 26:18, ASV). Paul used the metaphors of light and darkness once again and left no question as to its meaning. Darkness is that “power of Satan,” and light is what is offered by God—remission, inheritance, and sanctification. Paul’s imagery here exemplifies what was noted from 1 Thessalonians 5:5. Paul tells all that there is a way to go from being in darkness to being in the light. Concerning Acts 26:18, Jackson aptly states:

The purpose of Paul’s ministry would be to “open [the] eyes” of those who staggered in spiritual darkness—the darkness caused by Satan’s malevolent sway—and to influence them to turn (present—a constant challenge) unto God. One cannot turn “from” Satan and “unto” God until his eyes of perception are opened, and this is accomplished only by an exposure to divine revelation (as now manifested in biblical truth). The knowledge of truth, when surrendered to (Gal. 5:7), sets one free (Jn. 8:32). The design of all this, of course, is that folks may “receive remission of sins and an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith” in Christ.<sup>7</sup>

How then does one who is in darkness “turn on the light”? First, he must hear the Word of God. One must be exposed to the Light. That Light is the Word, and that Word came to this world in the flesh to

provide man with the Truth and "taketh away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:1-29). He, that Light, the Word, the Lamb, is the One Who is able (being the Light) to make one a child of light.

Yet, a person can understand from living in this world that if he is not pleasing to his father he can be removed from his father's will and lose his inheritance. How does one gain the father's inheritance? By continuing to do those things which are pleasing to his father. How does one become a child of light, a joint-heir of the Light (Rom. 8:17)? By doing those things that are pleasing to the Heavenly Father! Where are those things found? Only within the Word of God. Paul made this clear when he said: "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

Second, Paul's mentioning of "faith" in the Romans 10 context shows that "faith" is something one must have to become, and continue to be, a child of light. Hebrews 11 proves that this has been so throughout Biblical history. Showing that faith is *absolutely necessary* for one to be a child of light, Hebrews 11:6 declares: "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6). Again, this exposure was described as necessary when Paul penned: "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (2 Cor. 4:3-4).

The Gospel can be hid, but it has tremendous power when it shines into men. In 2 Corinthians 4:6, Paul further articulates: "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Thus, the Gospel is the knowledge of the Jesus Christ which is shined into a man's heart. How powerful is that Gospel? Paul answers: "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:16-17). What God has shined out, if it is not hidden and is allowed to shine in, can produce salvation to the one who will live by the faith it brings!

Third, the one who has heard God's will, and who desires to please Him, will "turn" from darkness to light—that is, he will repent. Repentance is that change of mind which, in turn, leads to a change in

actions, the reformation of one's life. The one who is willing (for it is one's choice, cf. Acts 26:18—"that they may") to "turn ... from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God" receives something. How does one turn to God? And what does that one receive? The answers to these questions will be discussed later.

Fourth, the one who will turn to God will do what is pleasing to God. Paul said:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God (Rom. 12:1-2).

What pleases God is for the one who is *shined on* to become the one who is *shined in* and saved? Confession is certainly a necessity for one if he is to turn from darkness to light and become a child of God. About confession, Paul informs: "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:9-10). The importance and necessity of confession was made clear when Jesus said: "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven" (Mt. 10:32-33).

Confession is a necessity to please God, but more than confession is required. In fact, more (than hearing, believing, repenting, and confessing) is required if one is to be found pleasing to God. To be pleasing to God, a person must "prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom. 12:2). Moreover, one cannot merely pick and choose what he wishes to do in his obedience to God. That will not do. One must submit to God's complete will. The same God Who calls on one to hear, believe, repent, and confess also requires for everyone to be baptized (cf. "be baptized every one of you," Acts 2:38). Laying out the spiritual nature of baptism and what occurs in that act of obedience, Paul explained:

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up

from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him (Rom. 6:3-9).

When one submits to baptism as described here, he arises from that watery grave a new creature, one who lives for Christ and has become a child of light (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 2:20; 3:26-27; Eph. 5:8).

Acts 26:18 identifies those things given to the child of light as the "forgiveness of sins" and an "inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in" Christ. Roman 6:23 and Acts 26:18 correspond to one another. "Forgiveness of sins" equates to salvation from death for "the wages of sin is death," and the "inheritance" equates to "the gift of God," which "is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). Then, the child of light is located (or has a portion) in: 1) the light (Col. 1:12; 1 Jn. 1:5-7; 2:8-10; 1 Pet. 2:9), 2) the light of life (Jn. 8:12), 3) the family of light (1 Thess. 5:5), and 4) in the light of spiritual Jerusalem (Rev. 21:24).

#### **THE SERVICE IS LIGHT— THE CHILDREN OF LIGHT ARE SHINING OUT**

"For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light" (Eph. 5:8). For the one who has turned from darkness to light (Acts 26:18), and is now "light in the Lord," there is service that must be done. The child of light must "walk as" a child "of light." How does one walk as a child of light? First, by having the proper fellowship. 1 John 1:7 points out: "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." John goes on to say: "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" (1 Jn. 2:6). To walk as a child of light one must walk as Christ walked. The child of light must strive to imitate Christ, making Him their example in life. Christ is our example of service. He came to earth with a singular mission. John the immerser identified Christ's mission when he saw Jesus and announced: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29). Jesus stated His

mission when he declared: “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Lk. 19:10). If the One Who is the true Light (Jn. 1:7-9) had that singular mission, what mission do the children of light have? How did the true Light, the Grand Example to the child of light, fulfill this mission? He shined out to the world through benevolence, evangelism, and edification.

First, Christ is an example of benevolence. The miracles He performed were to confirm the Word He taught and His power and authority as the Son of God. However, it was no accident that many of the miracles were done as benevolent acts. Examples of Christ’s benevolent acts include:

- The turning of water into wine (Jn. 2:1-11)—benevolence toward the bridegroom in providing for the needs of the feast.
- The raising of the young man of Nain (Lk. 7:11-15)—Christ has compassion (benevolence) upon the widow woman.
- The feeding of the 5,000 (Mt. 14:13-21; Mk. 6:31-34; Lk. 9:10-17; Jn. 6:5-15) and the feeding of the 4,000 (Mt. 15:32-39; Mk. 8:1-9)—Christ gives food to those in hunger.
- The coin in the fish’s mouth (Mt. 17:24-27)—Christ provided money.

More miracles could be listed that would show the benevolent nature of the One who is the true Light, but these are sufficient to show His nature as the Light. The child of light, having Christ as his example (1 Pet. 2:21), should shine forth in the same manner.

It must also be stated that to be in proper fellowship with Christ, one must not only look to Jesus as an example, he must also keep His commandments (1 Jn. 2:3-8). What does the New Testament say concerning the Christian and benevolent actions? Consider the following:

- “Therefore, *my beloved brethren*, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, *always abounding in the work of the Lord*, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58, emphasis added).
- “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10).
- “Honour widows that are widows indeed” (1 Tim. 5:3, 16).

- “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (Jas. 1:27). “Visit” here has a meaning, “To look after, with the acc., take care of, tend.”<sup>8</sup>
- The example of caring for the widows (Acts 6:1-6).
- “And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself” (Lk. 10:27). Christ’s definition and parable of action toward a neighbor—the Good Samaritan (cf. Lk. 10:25-37).
- “Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, *that he may have to give to him that needeth*” (Eph. 4:28, emphasis added).
- What was it that separated the sheep from the goats in the judgment scene of Matthew 25:31-46? The sheep were identified as those who gave food, gave drink, gave shelter, gave clothing, and visited (looked after, took care of, or tended).

For one to be a Christian, he must be like the Great Example and keep His commands concerning benevolence, all of which are found in the Scriptures (Note: The “benevolence” concept taught by the liberal advocates of the “Social-Gospel” is not found in the Scriptures and is not followed by the faithful Christian).

Second, Christ was, is, and always will be the Greatest Evangelist ever known. Yet, even this Greatest Evangelist could not convert every man He taught (cf. Mt. 19:16ff). The Son of God, the Sacrifice to fulfill His own message, declared His mission when He proclaimed: “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Lk. 19:10). Jesus Christ came from heaven to save the lost and offer salvation to every man (Mt. 1:21; 1 Tim. 2:4). This was planned by God before the foundation of the world (Eph. 3:9).

Making the connection between Christ’s evangelistic mission and His being the light of the world, Paul expressed:

[T]he god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them ... For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our

hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:4, 6).

Christ is that light which shines on men; and, if one will allow Him to shine into his heart, he will gain salvation. About the Great Evangelist, it is recorded that He preached: “Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt. 4:17). Beyond the example He provides to the Christian, Christ, via the Scriptures commands:

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost (Mt. 28:19).

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature (Mk. 16:15).

While some argue that those Scriptures apply only to the apostles, there are other Scriptures and implications which are applicable and must be accepted/obeyed by all.

Paul, being an apostle, was definitely subject to the command to “preach the gospel.” That he faithfully obeyed that command is seen in the record of his mission work (cf. Acts 13-28). It was this same apostle, Paul, who wrote to a young evangelist and commanded: “[T]he things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2). If Paul taught Timothy, and Timothy was to then teach other men what Paul had taught him, and those men were to teach the same to other men—then, the very same command to teach that applied to the apostles, applied to Paul, applied to Timothy, applied to those other men, *ad infinitum*. Therefore, it applies to every Christian living today. Practicality must also be applied to the Christian’s responsibility to *shine out* through evangelism because, the Word of God tells us that men must hear, believe and obey the Gospel before they can come to the Father (Mk. 16:15-16; Jn. 6:44-45).

Third, the Christian must shine out through edification of other Christians. Christ, the true Light, was an Edifier—He built up the brethren. Luke recorded that after His resurrection and before His ascension, Christ “... shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3; cf. Lk. 24:44-47). Christ did all of these things to edify His disciples before he departed from them, ascending back into Heaven. Going beyond what they say about the edifying work done by Christ, the Scriptures provide

information and instructions relative to the edifying work each Christian is obliged to do—as ordered by the Commander-in-Chief of God’s army. Note the following:

- The Christian is to be built up through study and is responsible to assist others with furthering their knowledge of Christ (Eph. 4:11-16).
- Christians are to “... consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Heb. 10:24-25).
- All the things a Christian does should be done to edify others (1 Cor. 14:26).
- The Christian is to heed Paul’s exhortation: “Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do” (1 Thess. 5:11).
- And, “Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another” (Rom. 14:19).
- And, “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (Eph. 4:29).

Edification comes not through knowledge (words) alone, but also through attitude. The edifier, to be most successful in his efforts, must possess and exhibit an attitude of service. This is evident because Paul taught: “[B]rethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but *by love serve one another*” (Gal. 5:13, emphasis added). How does the Christian exemplify this? Consider the example of our Lord and Savior, the Word, the true Light, as set forth by the “apostle of Love,” John, in the passage following:

Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded ... So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he

said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you (Jn. 13:3-5, 12-15).

What was the example given by our Master and Lord? Is it for one to go and wash others' feet? If that is the need another has, then that is the need that should be fulfilled. Here the example of the Lord is seen. The Creator, the Word, the true Light that came to earth in the flesh (Jn. 1:1-14) bends Himself to perform one of the lowliest acts a host would offer in that culture. The need was evident. The ones attending the dinner had traveled some distance on a dirt road, probably wearing open toed sandals. Their feet were dirty. In that day, as a show of respect, and to comfort his guests, the host would typically provide a servant to wash the visitors' feet. However, in the case of John 13:3-15, with no host present, and with a failure of all those who would call Him "Master" and "Lord" to rise and wash any others' feet, the Master and Lord of all—the King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tim. 6:5; Rev. 17:14; 19:16)—rose and served His disciples. The lesson for the Christian obvious—"If there is work to be done, I am the one to do the work." That is the example set for the Christian by his Master and Lord, the King of kings!

Edification of words and service is not enough for the one who will shine as the true Light shone. Love must also be within the one serving. For edification to be done in God's desired way, it must be done out of love. "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love" (1 Jn. 4:7-8). The Christian by love serves and serves to love, by love teaches and teaches to love. Christ shows us, as that true Light, the Great Example, the perfect way of love. It was in love that He came to this world (Jn. 3:16; 15:13). It was in love that He gave His life as a sacrifice for the sins of man (Rom. 5:8-9). The Christian brings forth love for others by heeding the principles Paul set forth, when he instructed:

Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in

prayer; Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality. Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men (Rom. 12:9-18).

Likewise, the faithful Christian will produce "the fruit of the Spirit." Identifying that fruit, Paul affirmed: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (Gal. 5:22-23). Each must examine himself to see if he possesses and exhibits:

- *Love*: That is "affectionate regard, goodwill, benevolence. With reference to God's love, it is God's willful direction toward man. It involves God doing what He knows is best for man and not necessarily what man desires."<sup>9</sup> Am I showing love as God showed love?
- *Joy*: God created man, created the world for man, sent His Son to offer salvation from sin to man, and established the church wherein there is fellowship with other Christians. Am I showing joy (gladness) for God's gifts?

- *Peace*:

Particularly in a single sense, the opposite of war and dissension ... Among individuals, peace, harmony ... Metaphorically peace of mind, tranquility, arising from reconciliation with God and a sense of a divine favor ... God is said to be a God of peace, not as one who needs peace, but one who dispenses peace. He expects peace of His people, meaning the absence of confusion.<sup>10</sup>

Am I a product of the single Source of light and therefore shining with a singleness of purpose?

- *Longsuffering*: The Christian is the one who will show "self-restraint before proceeding to action. The quality of a person who is able to avenge himself yet refrains from doing so ... patience in respect to persons."<sup>11</sup> Am I showing godly tolerance towards others?

- *Gentleness*: “It is the grace which pervades the whole nature, mellowing all which would be been [sic.] harsh and austere ... The word is descriptive of one’s disposition ...”<sup>12</sup> How do I approach others—am I harsh or am I gentle in my dealings with others?

- *Goodness*:

Benevolence, in Gal. 5:22 referred to as goodness, but the Eng. word includes several pleasing qualities whereas the Gr. word refers to one particular quality. It is more than ... gentleness, kindness, a mellowing of character. It is character energized, expressing itself in ... benevolence, active good. There is more activity in *agathōsúnē* [goodness] than in *chrēstótēs* [gentleness]. *Agathōsúnē* [goodness] does not spare sharpness and rebuke to cause good (*agathón*) in others. A person may display his *agathōsúnē*, his zeal for goodness and truth, in rebuking, correcting, or chastising.<sup>13</sup>

Am I one who does what is good, what is right, what is needed—do I show God’s benevolence?

- *Faith*: The Christian must have faith in order to please God (Heb. 11:1, 6). The necessity to have a belief, or conviction, a persuasion that leads one to action. Faith is not inactive or passive. It is active and because of one’s conviction by its persuasion. Am I a “father”—do I have a conviction from God that leads me to active participation in God’s will?

- *Meekness*:

Meekness, but not in a man’s outward behavior only, nor in his relations to his fellow man or his mere natural disposition ... It is that attitude of spirit we accept God’s dealings with us as good and do not dispute or resist ... Therefore, *prautēs* [meekness] is getting angry at the right time, in the right measure, and for the right reason ... it is a condition of mind and heart which demonstrates gentleness, not in weakness, but in power. It is a balance born in strength of character.<sup>14</sup>

Am I a man like Christ, with my anger under control, showing power with gentleness?

- *Temperance*: The ASV has “self-control” as a better way of expressing this particular trait. Am I one who can control self?

The child of light should walk as the Light did.

### CONCLUSION

There is a children's song that illustrates the metaphor of comparing the Christian and the Christian life to light. It goes in part:

This little light of mine,  
 I'm gonna let it shine.  
 Hide it under a bushel? No!  
 I'm gonna let it shine.  
 Don't let Satan blow it out,  
 I'm gonna let it shine.  
 Let it shine til Jesus comes,  
 I'm gonna let it shine.

"[C]hildren of light" (1 Thess. 5:5) have turned "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God" (Acts 26:18). They now walk "as children of light" (Eph. 5:8). The need for children of light to keep their lights shining constant and true is illustrated by the following:

We stopped at a garage just at dusk one evening. Something about the engine needed attention. A mechanic examined the trouble while a helper stood by, directing the beams of a powerful flashlight into the recesses under the hood. Something attracted the helper's attention. He turned away and in doing so inadvertently turned off the light. The mechanic looked up, and with good-humored impatience exclaimed: "Shine your light! What are you here for anyway?"

Our Savior—Our Source—Our Salvation says: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Mt. 5:16). Perhaps, the children's song needs to be an adult song, and we all should frequently and loudly sing:

Let it shine,  
 Let it shine,  
 Let it shine.

Maybe the vernacular of the last illustration needs to be remembered—*"Shine your light! What are you here for anyway?"*

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are taken from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1931), 4:34.

<sup>3</sup> Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990), 182.

<sup>4</sup> *The Pulpit Commentary: 1 Thessalonians*, ed. H. D. M. Spence-Jones (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2004), 103.

<sup>5</sup> Wanamaker, 182.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Melson, “The Coming of ‘The Day of the Lord,’” *Studies in 1 and 2 Thessalonians and Philemon*, ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Publications, Inc., 1988), 173.

<sup>7</sup> Wayne Jackson, *The Acts of the Apostles from Jerusalem to Rome* (Stockton, CA: Christian Courier Publications, 2005), 331.

<sup>8</sup> *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, ed. Spiros Zodhiates (Chattanooga, TN: AMG International, Inc., 1992), “1980. ἐπισκεπτομαι.”

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, “26. ἀγάπη.”

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, “1515. εἰρήνη.”

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, “3115. Μακροθυμία.”

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, “5544. Χρηστότης.”

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, “19. ἀγαθωσύνη.”

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, “4240. Πραΐτης.”

# “INHERITANCE OF THE SAINTS IN LIGHT”

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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Saints of light have many wonderful promises which are their heritage. This heritage grants all things that pertain unto life and godliness through the knowledge of Him that calls them by His own glory and virtue (2 Pet. 1:1-11). These exceeding and great promises allow saints to be partakers of the divine nature, escape corruption that is in the world and have an abundant entrance into the eternal kingdom of their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. As heirs, they have the privilege of appearing before the throne of God finding grace and mercy in times of need (Heb. 4:14-16). Saints are appointed heirs of all things (Rom. 8:32). They are heirs according to the promise, receiving the kingdom as a heritage (Gal. 3:29; Heb. 12:22-29; Col. 1:12-14) and obtaining eternal life to be immortal and incorruptible (1 Cor. 15:50-53). “Immortal” and “incorruptible” refer to the quality of an endless life. Jesus saves the saints through regeneration and washing of the Holy Spirit that they might be declared righteous in Christ and heirs according to the hope of everlasting life (Tit. 3:5-7). Salvation is a necessary part of this heritage of saints (Rom. 5:1-11; Heb. 6:12). They are sealed with the Holy Spirit as an earnest unto their inheritance of redemption (Eph. 1:12-14; 2 Cor. 1:21-22). By promise the saints receive a heritage from God and have opportunities to serve as priests (Rev. 1:6; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9). This inheritance of the redeemed is extensive while they live upon the earth and also in heaven. Prayers uttered on behalf of saints by the apostles of Christ demonstrate the magnitude and value of their heritage.

*Saints never expect to sin* (Heb. 6:1-10; 10:26; 1 Jn. 2:1-11) and furthermore should never desire to sin with such a Saviour. They must never overlook or excuse their sins. Sin is still sin no matter who commits it, and bargaining with it is never an option. There is no “in between” when seeking Godliness. As a part of God’s family, saints have come out of sin and separated themselves from it (2 Cor. 6:14-18). God grants the riches of His glory that saints might be strengthened with power through the Holy Spirit in the inward man (Eph. 3:14-19; 2 Cor. 4:16-18). With Christ dwelling in their hearts, through faith to the end, they receive all spiritual blessings in Christ (Eph. 1:3). Saints can apprehend the length, breadth, height and depth of what God’s love has provided for them both now and in eternity. God is able to do exceedingly, abundantly above all saints ask or think, according to the power that works in them (Eph. 3:20-21).

*Prayer is a vital part* of the Christian life. God grants serenity, permitting saints to accept His will and gives them courage to change their lives with wisdom to know right from wrong (Heb. 5:11-14). Heirs of God [sons and daughters] can approach their Father and undertake to petition, supplicate, bring thanksgiving and intercede on behalf of others (1 Tim. 2:1-5; Eph. 3:14-21). Prayer reflects the effect Christ has on the inner man (2 Cor. 4:16-18). Saints will desire opportunities and privileges of talking with God through the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn. 16:26). Those who inherit eternal life through Jesus Christ frequently seek to speak to God the Father and receive innumerable blessings both now and in the world to come.

*Because of being in the body of Christ*, His church, saints seek to be used in the kingdom and be “meet for the Master’s use.” “Meet for the Master’s use” denotes a discharge of service compatible with being a slave.<sup>2</sup> John the Baptizer was not “fit” to undo the lashes of Jesus’ sandals. “Meet for the Master’s use” indicates that God makes individuals *adequate, sufficient or enough to do His work.* This implies that the individual has confidence God will act in an impressive way to assure His servants that they are acting to discharge their service adequately, sufficiently or with enough desire to accomplish any task assigned to them. Paul expressed a concern that he was called an apostle of Christ even though he had persecuted the church. God’s grace manifested forgiveness and called Paul to fulfill the task of an apostle of Christ (“meet for the Master’s use”). Writing of his trials, Paul displays how arduous it may become (2 Cor. 11:21-33). He

concluded his life's work saying: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13). Paul was made *fit* for the Master's use by learning that in whatsoever state he was he could find contentment and abound in the strength of the Lord (Phil. 1:10-20). Subsequently, the redeemed can cling to their high calling, wisdom, righteousness, redemption and sanctification in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 1:1-2; 26-31). In Colossians 1:12 Paul gives thanks that God the Father has made us meet for His use and partakers of the heritage with the saints of light.

*The apostle Paul was a praying man.* We should always consider Paul and his prayer life. Paul's ends his prayer for the Colossian saints that they might be steadfast, unaffected, not moved away from the hope of the gospel which they had heard (Col. 1:9-23). Throughout his epistles there are prayers for the saints that they might see the great importance of being ready to do the Lord's work. Paul established a personal companionship of the saints within his prayers of supplication and intercession. Contained in each of Paul's books there are many prayers which demonstrate what saints of light will need. His prayers are extensive. The outpouring of Paul's heart affords an insight into an apostolic heart and character. Those who desire welfare for God's people engage in prayers of supplication, thanksgiving and intercession (1 Tim. 2:1-5). Prayers of the godly are answered in accordance with the will of God (Mt. 26:39). Prayer is more than a doctrine. It is a dynamic part of Christian living. Paul calls God to be his witness when he mentions the brethren ceaselessly (Rom. 1:9). Noteworthy parts of Paul's prayer life are his thanksgiving on behalf of the church and his requests for their joy (1 Cor. 1:4; Eph. 1:16; Phil. 1:4).

In the early days of the Church there were no manuals of devotion or directories on how to develop a spiritual life.<sup>3</sup> The master-plan of information was found in the letters and practices of the apostles of Christ. They guided the church into a daily routine which was remarkable. Spiritual living, temporal matters, family affairs, congregational circumstances, intercessions and more were prominent in prayer. Prayers carried the burdens of the saints to the throne of God where mercy and grace were found (Heb. 4:14-16). Praise of brethren was interjected into prayer. Often individuals were specifically selected and mentioned. Their needs and circumstances were communicated to the churches with requests for their prayers (Rom. 16). The privilege of being a child and an heir of God, with fellowship and communion, was

a cause for rejoicing by the apostles and the church (2 Cor. 6:10). There was the possibility of asking for that which would be harmful, but the apostles corrected and guided believers toward greater maturity in the spiritual realm (Acts 8:14-24).

*Growing in grace and knowledge* is urgent in all circumstances (Rom. 1:8-15; 1 Thess. 3:13). Prayers for those in doubt, by those who are spiritual, are expressed in a spirit of gentleness, looking to themselves, lest they also be tempted (Gal. 6:1-5; Phil. 1:3-11). Peace, grace and mercy are requested in prayer (Rom. 15:33; 16:20; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 5:23). In the heartache of seeing the church at Corinth dealing with its problems, Paul reminded the brethren there that he was praying for them (1 Cor. 1:2-10). Stating gratitude for saints was a joy to Paul. Love is extolled as the noblest of reasons for thanksgiving. Paul's prayers, and those of others, were simple, fervent and intelligent. Confessions for things needed and gratitude for needs received were constants in prayer. When failures overtook Christians, others were made aware and prayers were offered on their behalf (1 Jn. 5:13-21).

*God is a God of all comfort*, and through His comfort saints learn to comfort others (2 Cor. 1:1-11). Often the inheritance seems intangible but prayer reminds the saint of its worth. Comfort can be exercised in prayer—requesting skills to say or do the right thing. Saints have tremendous difficulties in life and prayers can ask for a faith that is buoyant and elastic, a faith that will remain firm to the end wherein the eternal inheritance of an eternal home is completed. Paul had a thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:7). Although the thorn was not removed, the assurance of brethren praying on his behalf and God's affirmation of His grace blessed Paul (Gal. 4:12-20; Phil. 4:13). God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6). God's grace is sufficient. When the Gospel was being compromised, Paul urged the saints to heed the truth of the Gospel (Gal. 1:6-10). Praying for the saints to remain sanctified heirs is of great importance (1 Cor. 1:18-31; Gal. 6:18).

*Having spiritual blessings* in life and knowing the extent of God's gift of salvation through Christ will bring forth a prayer of thanksgiving and gratitude (Eph. 1:3-15). Fidelity to Christ and acceptance of His will confirms hope (Eph. 1:15-20). Exalting God and worshiping Him in spirit and truth is inconceivable without faith. Inner fullness of being grounded and rooted in love allows the faithful saint to have some comprehension of the breadth, length, depth and height of God's love

for him (Eph. 3:14-21). The apostle concentrated on the strengthening of the inward man (2 Cor. 4:16-18; Gal. 5:16-24; Eph. 3:16).

*When God begins a work He gives* what is needed to complete it (Phil. 1:1-7; 2:12-18; 4:10-20). Peace with God passes all understanding and keeps hearts and minds secure (Phil. 4:6-7, 19-20). Saints should be prayerful, careful and thankful for everything because God has richly bestowed grace, glory and goodness upon them (1 Pet. 5:7; Eph. 6:18; Phil. 1:7; 3:16; Rom. 2:4). That which is calculated to destroy the church must be combated with prayer and actions (Col. 1:1-8; 2:14-23). Loyalty to God is saintly. Converts need strength to defend themselves from evil and to be perfected in the will of God (Col. 1:9). Reverence is due God for the eternal hope we enjoy. When fellow-workers are faithful and sound it is appropriate to pray on their behalf, and if they should stumble it is appropriate to pray that they seek forgiveness through repentance (Col. 1:3). There is a constant concern for converts that they will be filled with the knowledge of God's will (Col. 1:9). Paul's lofty standard was that all would walk pleasing to God (Col. 1:10). In busy lives prayer can be a struggle. It takes thought and time. Those who pray must marshal themselves in a war against Satan (Col. 2:1). Individuals translated from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's Son will always need the prayers of their fellow saints. Those in fellowship in the work for Christ must make time to engage their heart, mind and soul in prayer about their fellow Christians (Col. 4:2-17).

*Prayer carries with it a ceaseless* thanksgiving that the God who sanctifies the saints will wholly give them preservation of soul, spirit and body that all might be blameless in His sight (1 Thess. 5:17-28). Saints face daunting tasks and need to grow in grace and knowledge. It is common sense that an apostle of Christ should be concerned about Satan seeking to find a means to work mischief in the lives of the heirs of Christ. Uniquely, Paul expresses his gratitude for the spiritual blessings God grants to saints (1 Thess. 3:9-13). Those under divine control will live faithfully and righteously. Being "meet for the Master's use" gives clarity to faith, charity and hope (1 Cor. 13:1-13). The writer of Hebrews tells of the faithful who understood what was required of them in being "meet for the Master's use." Abraham, Isaac, Israel, Joseph and Moses demonstrate that looking toward the recompense of the reward allowed them to trust that God would not be ashamed to call them His own (Heb. 11:1-40). Being encompassed by

so great a cloud of witnesses, saints must lay aside all sin which can beset them and run the race set before them. While looking to the Author and Perfecter of our faith, peace with sanctification follows, without which no man will see God. The carefulness of a saint's walk reminds others of our common and great heritage. It must not be sold for a mess of meat as was done by Esau. He sought to regain his heritage but was rejected, for there was no place found for him to change his mind (Heb. 12:14-17; 2 Thess. 3:1-5). Saints look forward to their heritage, the heavenly city, foursquare which is prepared for them (Heb. 12:18-29; Jn. 14:1-5; Rev. 21:9-27).

*Saints are those who have been made meet* for the Master's use (Col. 1:12). The epithet "saint"<sup>4</sup> is applied to a person distinguished in piety and virtue, consecrated and sanctified. Being pious and godly are in the character of a saint (Ps. 4:3; 30:4; Tit. 2:11-14). These words mean "clean," "pure" and are used to speak of those who are *holy, hallowed* or *sacred* (Ex. 28:41; Lev. 21:6; 1 Pet. 2:5). In Greek the word "saint" [*hagios*] designates a person as one of exceptional holiness.<sup>5</sup> Holiness is attested to in the Old Testament as that which is connected to God in a sanctified relationship. In the New Testament "sanctified" means set apart by God.

*Holiness or saintliness* is derived from Christ. By being in Christ and in His church, one is called holy (1 Cor. 3:17; Eph. 2:21; 1 Cor. 12:12-30). Out of Christ's sacrifice came a community of those separated unto God to be holy as He is holy (1 Pet. 1:12-25). A life of holiness is one of service to God and man (Eph. 1:15; Gal. 5:6; 6:1-14; Col. 1:4; Eph. 4:12; Rom. 15:25; 16:15; 2 Cor. 5:17; 13:12).<sup>6</sup> The saint is consecrated to God and has a service as a priest, being given duties to perform in the name of the Lord (Rev. 1:6; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9). Prophets, priests, kings and apostles of Christ were consecrated to God (Acts 3:21; 2 Pet. 1:21; Eph. 3:5). Saintliness has to do with those who have been sanctified, purified or set apart to a pious task (Acts 9:13-31; Rom. 1:7). Men do not make decisions concerning who should be a saint. Only God can set apart the individuals to be called saints.

*The doctrine of sanctification* is the way and means of dedication to God. Jesus Christ sanctifies and makes an individual holy or a saint (1 Cor. 1:1-2, 30). Sanctification suggests a setting apart from that which is common or unclean. Separated from sin is to be sanctified (1 Cor. 5:7). Being washed from sin and adorned with purity summarizes this doctrine. Those in Christ are called "righteous" by virtue of

Jesus reconciling them unto God by His death (2 Cor. 5:11-21). This purification is not external, but rather is in the inner man (2 Cor. 4:16-18). Holiness is accrued by the blood of Jesus, and without holiness no man will see God (Heb. 12:14). Sanctification is used to designate a state allowed because of being baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27; Eph. 1:3-15). It is produced by becoming a "new man" in Christ (Eph. 2:1-22; 1 Cor. 6:11; Eph. 5:26; 1 Thess. 4:3-7). When individuals are solemnly and unreservedly able to surrender to God, allowing the blood of Jesus to be the agency whereby they are washed, then they can be called "saints," sanctified and renewed (Rom. 12:2). Sanctification is the saving work of grace whereby the individual becomes holy unto God. Being separated from darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son renders an individual sanctified. Moral virtue is not enough for one to be called sanctified. A spiritually virtuous person hates sin and recognizes the need to put sin to death (Col. 3:5). Merely having a "form of godliness" is not acceptable. It must be godliness in its purest form (2 Tim. 3:5; Eph. 4:24).<sup>7</sup> God sanctifies (1 Thess. 4:3; 5:23). He justifies the guilty and sets the captive free (2 Cor. 5:18-20). Christ died to sanctify mankind (Heb. 2:11; 10:10-14; Tit. 2:14). Those who are sanctified separate themselves from all sin, determining that right is a principle worthy to have in each one's life (Jas. 4:4; Rom. 12:9). All saints desire holiness and cannot continue in sin (1 Jn. 2:1-5). Saints have believed with the heart that Jesus is the risen Lord and made confession with the mouth that Jesus is Lord (Rom. 10:1-17). Being immersed into Christ for the remission of sins allows an individual to be called a "saint." The church cannot *canonize* an individual making one a "saint" (Acts 2:38-42). The perfect deliverance from sin by the blood of Jesus is what is necessary for one to be called a "saint" (Eph. 1:3-14).

*Sanctification is received* upon obedience to the first principles of the oracles of God (6:1-8). The words "holy," "hallow," "hallowed," "holiness," "consecrated," "sanctify" and "sanctification" are from the same root word. None of these words can be understood without the inclusion of all. Sanctification means to make a Christian holy unto the Lord. The freeing of obedient believers from sin and enabling them to realize the will of God in their lives is the concept of "saint or sanctified."<sup>8</sup> It means to separate from the world and be consecrated unto God (1 Jn. 1:4-10). As children of obedience, Christians will fashion their lives, not according to former lusts, but in the holiness of God

(1 Pet. 1:13-25). The word “saint” does not mean one is *morally perfect*, but one who belongs to Christ. Paul saluted the *saints* in Corinth; however, he later rebuked them for their carnal activities which were unbecoming *a sanctified one in Christ*. The saint cleanses and purifies his life by prayer and practice. Scripture specifies a difference between the sacred and the common. Saints have a sacred trust and live accordingly. Being sanctified and called a “saint” is further illustrated by the Christian also being called a *sanctuary of the Holy Spirit* (1 Cor. 3:16-18; 6:18-20). The transformation of a believer’s life is when one is made a partaker of the inheritance of the saints of light by being delivered out of the power of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of God (Col. 1:9-23). Saints are the redeemed (1 Cor. 1:26-31). God’s supremacy and holiness must be manifested in the life of a believer prior to being called holy (1 Cor. 1:1-2). Sanctifying and setting God apart as *holy* underscores God’s claim to supreme power and glory.

*In general sanctification* encompasses the entire life of a Christian (Gal. 5:22-23; 1 Pet. 1:15-16, 22; Heb. 12:10). Propitiation is God’s gracious disposition to provide, by Christ’s vicarious death on the cross, a sacrifice which dealt with sin by a display of mercy and grace (Eph. 2:1-10; Rom. 3:2-30). God expiated the sins of mankind by the blood of the perfect “Lamb” (Jn. 1:29, 36). Through the propitious act of Christ’s sacrifice, those who believe and obey are justly delivered from the wrath of God and come under a covenant of grace with God the Father. God is not reconciled to man, but rather man is reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:15-20). Enmity against God is the result of man’s actions alone. Man needs to be reconciled to God and sanctified in Christ. The expiatory work of Christ on the cross is the means whereby the barrier is removed (Eph. 2:11-22). Christ voided the power of sin to separate an obedient believer from God by sacrificially interposing His sinless life as a propitious sacrifice (Heb. 2:6-18; Rom. 1:1-5; 6:1-11). Man forfeits his soul because of sin and God provides the one and only way whereby eternal life can be granted, namely the voluntary laying down of the life of His Son. God’s provisions, wherein He sanctifies, are found in His calling, justifying and ultimately glorifying the obedient believer (Rom. 8:26-30).

God “*justifies*” believers on the grounds of their faithful obedience, Christ’s death, and His unmerited gift of life (Eph. 2:5, 8-9). Broadly speaking, God ordains a person to be justified, charging them to be

obedient and faithful throughout life (1 Tim. 1:5-11; Rev. 2:10). Removing of sins is equivalent to being *acquitted* through the expiratory sacrifice of Jesus (Rom. 5:1-18). Neither righteousness nor justification is imputed. It is a declaration of God because of one being in Christ (Gal. 3:27; Eph. 1:3-14; Rom. 3:20-26). A case study is found in the life of Abraham (Rom. 4). In the acceptance of God's standards, the life of the justified was manifested. The history of Abraham was written for us that we might see what God has done and can do (Rom. 15:1-5; 1 Cor. 10:1-13). We have further evidence of God's ability to justify because He raised Jesus from the dead (Rom. 4:24-25). We are "made meet for the Master's use" by heeding the "calling" and making our "election" sure (2 Pet. 1:3-11). New Testament believers are called the "house" or "people" of God because they belong exclusively to God (1 Tim. 3:14-16). They are called the "church of the firstborn" (Heb. 12:23), which was an Old Testament term for one "set apart." Being a saint is not an attainment, but rather a state of being because of God's grace. Christians are a part of the body of Christ, and as such are consecrated unto His service (1 Cor. 12:12-31; Rom. 1:7; 2 Cor. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:2). Saints are those individuals who walk in unity, truth, love, light, wisdom and are devoid of things which are not befitting (Eph. 4:1-32; 5:8-17). Saints should be filled with the knowledge of God's will (Col. 1:9). Saints are accompanied by wisdom and understanding (Jas. 3:13-15; Col. 1:9). Saints walk worthy of the Lord (Col. 1:10). Christians are called saints in the Bible (Acts 11:26). Saints please the Lord by being fruitful in every good work (Col. 1:10; Eph. 2:8-10). Saints are strengthened in the might of the Lord (Col. 1:11; Eph. 3:16, 20; 6:10, 13). They give thanks (Col. 1:12-14). The provision of salvation, forgiveness of sins and being put into the kingdom of God's Son makes them partakers of the inheritance of God as saints. Saints have the hope of glory because they have been called by the Gospel (Rom. 1:7; 2 Thess. 2:14; Rom. 8:25-39). Saints are sanctified by the Word of God (Jn. 17:17).

*Saints have an inheritance* which is substantially verified in the New Testament. Being made "meet for the Master's use" is possible because God qualifies His people by saving them. The first principles of the oracles of God teach that one must hear the Word of God (Rom. 10:14-15). One must receive the truth which can set him free. Faith which comes by hearing God's word leads inextricably to repentance of sins (Acts 2:38; 11:18; Lk. 13:3-5). Confession that Christ is the Son

of God is imperative (Mt. 10:32-33; Rom. 10:10). One is immersed, baptized into Christ, as an act of obedience (Acts 2:38; 22:16). Thus, God qualifies one to be a partaker of eternal life and “meet for the Master’s use” by his being faithful—even unto death (Rev. 2:10). The word “inheritance” includes all the promises God made through Jesus Christ. There is a growth implied wherein one is a “baby” and grows to adulthood, to be a “man” in Christ (1 Pet. 2:1-4; Heb. 5:11-14). This progression makes us “meet for the Master’s use” (Col. 2:10; Ju. 1; 1 Cor. 1:30). Being a partaker means that the saint has a portion in the Kingdom of God. Saints are joint-heirs with all of the redeemed of all the ages *via* the blood of Jesus Christ (Heb. 12:22-29). Saints are servants of God, priests unto Him through Christ, a kingdom, tabernacle, house of God, body of Christ, pillar and ground of truth, and family of God. These are only a part of the earthly inheritance granted to the sanctified in Christ. Saints are vessels sanctified [meet] for the Master’s use, having purged themselves that they might honor God and prepare themselves unto every good work (2 Tim. 2:20-26).

*Christ was appointed* heir of all things (Heb. 1:2). God promised to give to the redeemed all things freely through Christ (Rom. 8:32). As Abraham’s seed the saints inherit His promises (Gal. 3:24-29). Saints inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:50), eternal life (1 Jn. 5:13; Tit. 3:5-7), and salvation because of Christ’s sacrifice—all a heritage for the saints of God (Heb. 1:14; 6:12). As a saint, the obedient believer becomes a temple of God and is sealed with the Spirit of promise (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:18-20; 2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13-16). God has pledged that He will do specific things for His saints. God’s promises are a part of the Christian’s inheritance. His promises are the grounds for our hope and joy. God’s pledge is sacred and will not be broken (Heb. 6:13-20). Regarding all that He promised, there has not been one failure in His Word (Ps. 68:11; 105:42). Many promises have been made to Biblical characters wherein is found the faithfulness of God (Acts 26:2-3). Saints are heirs of the promise made to Abraham (Gal. 3:29). Through His promises God has given many precious things (2 Pet. 1:3-11). All of God’s promises are written in His Word, which is the only authentic revelation of His divine purpose (Eph. 1:3-15; Rom. 1:2; Num. 23:19; Heb. 6:18). God’s promises to the heirs of Abraham are remarkably sublime, excellent and reasonable. Their strength is that God manifested His wisdom, holiness and perfection with awesome threatenings for those who act in opposition to His will.

God's promises require a unique intensity which employs man's soul, mind and will. At the end of life's journey, saints want to hear: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (Mt. 25:21).

### CONCLUSION

The Bible is God breathed (2 Tim. 3:16-17). This truth of God confirms the promises. They are established by His faithfulness (Heb. 10:23). Heirs according to the promises rely upon the blood of Jesus for its cleansing power (1 Jn. 1:5-10). Saints are no longer troubled by their past sins for Christ has covered, removed, concealed and cast them away (Rom. 4:7; Col. 2:13). Obedient believers have been saved from sin and God's coming wrath (Mt. 1:21; Rom. 1:18-20; 3:21-29; 5:9). God's grace and mercy have saved to the utmost those obedient to His will (Eph. 2:1-11). Saints are now heirs of eternal life and all the spiritual blessings which are to come (1 Jn. 5:13). Saints are the house of God (1 Tim. 3:14-16). They are the bride of Christ awaiting the wedding feast in the heavenly land (2 Cor. 11:1-2; Rev 19:5-19). Having such promises we joyfully cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness.

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are taken from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey Bromiley, trans. and ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 3:Q-K.

<sup>3</sup> Herbert Lockyer, *All The Prayers Of The Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), 238-278.

<sup>4</sup> John McClintock, *Cyclopedia of Biblical Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature* (Franklin Square, NY: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1880), 245-246.

<sup>5</sup> Gerhard Kettel, *Theological Dictionary Of New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing company, 1977), 1:88-110.

<sup>6</sup> W.E. Vine, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), 339, 340.

<sup>7</sup> Lockyer, 217-221.

<sup>8</sup> James Orr, gen. ed, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), 2682-2686.

# “I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD”

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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

At the creation of the world, God created a pristine environment. He furnished man with every need, providing for him in every way possible. He also gave him the ability to choose, making him a creature of free choice. Sadly, Adam and Eve chose what was evil, and thus sin entered the world. There were deep and abiding consequences resulting from their choice. Because sin is the transgression of God's law, and because God is perfect in every way, it would only seem right to characterize God as *Light* and Satan as *darkness* (Acts 26:18). With the entrance of sin into the world, a darkness permeated life, and from the beginning of time, man has continued in his struggle between good and evil, right and wrong.

As revealed in the Old Testament, sin was an ever-present problem in the lives of God's people. Beginning with Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel, sin became a blight on a beautiful world. Whether it was Abraham, Samson, King David, or Ahab and Jezebel, the children of Israel often found themselves in dark and bleak circumstances. Because of their sins, people often suffered and lived in darkness and despair. Sin is indeed a terrible thing, not only separating the sinner from God, but also bringing wrath, indignation, tribulation, and anguish upon every soul that does evil (Rom. 2:8-9).

Throughout the Bible, the word "darkness" is used as a metaphor to describe the terrible condition of sinful man. It was used in the case of those who "walked in darkness" as a symbol for describing sin (Isa. 9:2), and by others to describe the punishment of evildoers whose

sentence will result in the blackness of darkness forever (Ju. 1:13; cf. Mt. 8:12; 25:30). "Darkness," as a metaphor, is a vivid symbol for characterizing the realm of a sinful world. From the beginning, man has been at war against "the rulers of the darkness of this world" (Eph. 6:12), and when Jesus entered the world, men were held captive by darkness. Matthew, in referring to the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 9, revealed that men were sitting in darkness and "in the region and shadow of death" (Mt. 4:16). Immorality and false doctrine were rampant. The whole world was lying in wickedness (1 Jn. 5:19). Similar to the children of Israel in Isaiah's day, the people of the first century were a sinful nation and a people laden with iniquity. They were a seed of evildoers, children that were corrupt, and those that had forsaken the Lord. They were, as described by Peter, a "crooked generation" (Acts 2:40).

Not only does the Bible describe the heinous condition of man at the coming of Jesus, we also know from secular history that crimes of unimaginable proportion were committed. The Roman Empire in its quest and thirst for blood and power dominated the world. Its emperors were often dominated by passions of the flesh. Drunken orgies, pedophilia, prostitution, slavery, rape, and pillage at times characterized many of the citizens of Rome. Human rights abuse and war atrocities were often committed by the Romans, as well as nations prior to them. Homosexuality was often accepted and embraced among the Roman legions. Abortion (in an ancient form) was practiced. Drunkenness and debauchery and imperially approved murder were at times committed by those in positions of authority. Philosophically, the various world views which shaped behavior emanated from humanistic ideas revealed in such philosophies as stoicism, Epicureanism, and skepticism.

Religiously, there was confusion and division among the pagans. Prostitution in the name of worship was practiced. The use of hallucinogenic drugs was utilized for the purpose of inducing so-called revelation. The plethora of deities that were worshipped throughout various cities caused many to be superstitious and often brought fear and ignorance. Among the Jews, sectarianism characterized their religious practices with radicalism on one side and liberalism on the other. Greed and avarice, and the acceptance of Hellenism, were often associated with some among the Sadducees. Exclusivism and religious elitism characterized the Pharisees. Religious education was reserved for the privileged few, and was often convoluted by the mire of human

traditions. All of this and more is evidence that the world was under the power of Satanic rule, a rule characterized by darkness for one whose kingdom was full of darkness and whose citizenry “gnawed their tongues for pain” (Rev. 16:10). It was within this sinful context and darkened world that Jesus made the immortal statement: “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life” (Jn. 8:12). With the coming of Jesus, *light did spring up* (Mt. 4:16). The darkness had power over man (Col. 1:13), and yet into its domain a light did shine, giving hope to those who were held captive by its power; “Seeing it is God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6).

Today, as in the first century, souls are so desperately seeking peace, joy, and happiness. People yearns for a life filled with meaning and purpose. The quintessential qualities of grace, mercy, forgiveness, and hope are those for which men greatly long. Each of these, as a whole, is associated with the brightening metaphor of light (Eph. 5:8-20; 1Tim. 6:16; 2 Tim. 1:10; 1 Jn. 1:7). As we shall see in the pages that follow, the origin and essence of that light are inextricably bound in Jesus. Not only is Jesus the Light of the world, the beloved apostle, John, reveals: “In him was life; and the life was the light of men” (Jn. 1:4). He was “the true light, even the light which lighteth every man, coming into the world” (Jn. 1:9). This Light has always existed, for it was in the beginning with God (Jn. 1:1). The light of Jesus shined “in darkness” but the darkness was unable to overtake it (Jn. 1:5). With Jesus’ coming into the world, as revealed in John’s Gospel account, darkness existed within the lives of many whom Jesus sought to save. Some saw that Light and their eyes were opened; others remained in their darkness and failed to comprehend who Jesus really was.

Souls today must not have their understanding darkened. All of us must come to appreciate the essence and true meaning found in the phrase: “I am the light of the world” (Jn. 8:12). The following pages are but one man’s feeble attempt to expound upon the context of that well-known verse so that we might come to appreciate all the more the light of Jesus shining in our own hearts.

### THE LITERARY CONTEXT

To better appreciate the statement of John 8:12, one must remember the larger context presented in John’s Gospel account. Like other

Gospel accounts, it has a thematic structure and purpose. John's purpose is to produce belief in his readers (Jn. 20:30-31) by seeking first to reveal and demonstrate that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and Savior of the world (Jn. 4:42). Second, he wants people to know the true identity of Jesus so that they might have life through His name. To accomplish these objectives, he employs the aid of many things—the statements of eye-witnesses (e.g. John the Baptist, the Samaritan woman, Jesus Himself, and God; Jn. 1:29; 4:39-42; 8:13-14; 8:17; 12:28-30), accounts of the life, ministry, and works of Jesus, including His sermons, and through His ultimate death and resurrection. He also documented the Lord's use of miracles to substantiate His claims.

Eyewitness testimonies, sermons, miracles as a sign that Jesus was the Christ, were all recorded by other Gospel writers; however, John alone utilizes the unique "I am" statements from the Lord's sermon to further expound upon the truth that Jesus is the Son of God. Those who would seek to follow God must come to a realization of the fact that Jesus is the Son of God—deity in the flesh. While John revealed that many did not accept Jesus as the Messiah, he nevertheless presents an ironclad case that Jesus is indeed the true light from above. His presentation takes the form of various "I am" statements made by Jesus.

Attention must be given to the "*ego eimi*" statements, translated "I am," prefixed to the numerous metaphors used by Jesus in proving His deity. While many of the metaphors utilized in the "I am" statements aid the reader in understanding more of what Jesus provides (for example, bread, door, shepherd), more specifically the "I am" statements make a direct connection to His deity as compared to qualities and characteristics ascribed to God in the Old Testament. Just as God, for example, gave the Israelites manna in the wilderness (Jn. 6:32), so Jesus describes Himself as the true bread who comes down from heaven (Jn. 6:33-35). Additionally, when Jesus describes Himself as the Truth (Jn. 14:6), which is the Word of God that became flesh (1:1, 14), an immediate connection should be made that Christ is God, when considering that God's Word is that which gives life to sinners (Ps. 119:50), and brought the world into existence (Ps. 33:6-9). Naturally, one can easily make the connection between the "I am" statement devoid of a predicate found in John 8:58, and that of God, when uttered to Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3:14—"I Am that I Am."

Most notably, the "I am" statement associated with light is a direct correlation between Jesus and God. The glory of the presence of God,

found in the cloud that led the people of Israel to the promised land and protected them from their enemies, came to be symbolized by the metaphor of light, as found in various well-known and cherished passages of the Old Testament. For example, the Israelites would often sing, "Jehovah is my light and my salvation" (Ps. 27:1). God and His law were also thought of as a light and guide (Ps. 119:105; Pro. 6:23). His light was also conveyed in revelation (Ezek. 1:4, 13-28), salvation (Hab. 3:3-4), and in showing His power in action (Ps. 44:3). Furthermore, the concept of light associated with God can also be seen in Isaiah, where the servant of the Lord (i.e., Jesus), would be appointed as a light to the Gentiles, that He might bring salvation to the ends of the earth (Isa. 49:6; cf. 60:19-22). One additional passage to which one should refer is in Zechariah 14:5-7, as will be discussed below. This passage makes reference to the symbols of water and light that ultimately came to be utilized in the feast of booths.

The use of light as a symbol representing God in the Old Testament, and its connection with Jesus under the New, points to an inescapable conclusion that Jesus is God. Additionally, it must be remembered that while the symbol of light in reference to God was in primary use by the Jews, John 8:12 makes it abundantly clear that Jesus is a light, not for the Jews only, but for the whole world. As long as Jesus is "in the world," (Jn. 9:5), that is to say, revered and preached by men, He will be "*the* light of the world" (emphasis added).

#### THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

To further appreciate the symbolism involved in the Lord's statement, "I am the light of the world," it is crucial to note that this statement was uttered during the feast of tabernacles (Jn. 7:2). This feast was instituted in the Pentateuch (Lev. 23:34; Deut. 16:13; 31:10), and was also referred to as the "feast of ingathering" (Ex. 23:16; 34:22), sometimes as "the feast" (1 Kgs. 8:2; Ezek. 14:23; 2 Chron. 8:8), or the "feast of Jehovah" (Lev. 23:39; Jgs. 21:19). The feast was agricultural in its origin, as evidenced by the name (feast of ingathering), and from the ceremonies that accompanied it, and by the season and occasion of its celebration. It was to be celebrated beginning on the fifteenth day of the seventh month and continued for seven straight days, culminating in a final eighth day with a unique set of sacrifices and traditions. The feast was also characterized by several important elements. First, it was a time of thanksgiving for the fruit harvest, and

coming as it did at the completion of the entire harvest, it was often thought of as a time of general thanksgiving for the bounty that God had given throughout the year.

A second element associated with the feast was the construction of tabernacles, or booths. Leviticus 23:40 show that on the first day of the feast, the Israelites were to take trees and branches from palm trees, the boughs of thick trees, and the willows of the brook, and construct a type of small house, or booth, wherein all males were to reside throughout the feast, in remembrance of the time that God took care of the children of Israel while they dwelled in tents in the wilderness.

A third element involved the numerous sacrifices to be made at the temple. Besides the daily sacrifices offered in the evening and the morning, others were offered specifically for the feast (Num. 29:12-38). For seven days, the priests were required to offer two rams, fourteen lambs, and a goat for the sin offering. The number of bullocks to be offered decreased by one, each of the succeeding seven days. A total of 182 sacrifices were to be offered during the feast of tabernacles.

While space here will not permit us to discuss all the elements and traditions that developed in connection with the feast of the tabernacles, an important one for our purposes in regard to John 7-8, involves the later development of the symbolic use of water and light. As referenced earlier, Zechariah 14:5-9 makes use of these symbols in referring to both the promise of a continual light, and the promise of living water flowing from Jerusalem at the dawning of the Messianic Age. Over time, these two symbols came to be associated with the feast of tabernacles. Water, as revealed in various passages, was used as an element in cleansing (see Leviticus), religious service (1 Sam. 7:6), and salvation (Gen. 6-8). At the feast of tabernacles it was used to symbolize the rain given by God during the growing season.<sup>2</sup> At the feast, water was taken from the Pool of Siloam (meaning "sent"; thus sent by God) and carried in golden pitchers to the temple where at the base of the altar it was poured. All of this was done amidst a crowd of worshippers who were waving palm branches and singing the words of Psalm 118.1.<sup>3</sup> It was within this context that Jesus uttered this statement: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, from within him shall flow rivers of living water" (Jn. 7:37-38). The reaction to this statement was immediate. It was offensive to some but brought hope to others. For some, their understanding was darkened all the more because of the

hardness of their heart. Others joyously received it, coming to the realization that the Messiah and the Messianic Era had arrived.

The other symbol, the symbol of light, could be seen in the use of the lighting of the large candelabras of the temple. These candelabras were located within the court of the women, inside the temple proper, and when lit, was a symbol of both the glory of God which once filled the temple, and the pillar of fire that led the children of Israel as they journeyed through the wilderness. “Jewish teachers taught that the name of Messiah was light” (Isa. 62:1-3), and that David made use of the word light in Psalms 27 and 118 to describe the Lord (cf. Mal. 4:2; Lk. 2:30-32).<sup>4</sup> According to Edersheim, “the light shining out of the temple into the darkness around, and lighting up every court in Jerusalem must have been intended as a symbol, not only of the *shechinah* (i.e., a rabbinic expression meaning “God’s presence,” JWM) which once filled the temple, but of that ‘great light’, which ‘the people that walked in darkness’ were to see, and which was to shine ‘upon them that dwell in the land of the shadow of death’” (Isa. 9:2). Thus, for Jesus to utter the statement that He was “the light of the world” at such an important event which possessed these divine symbols was of tremendous importance. Since, the illumination of these great candelabras was “associated with the great expectation of the coming Messiah, and the harvest of peoples turning to the Lord” (Isa. 62:1-3),<sup>5</sup> the Lord’s statement at this time and in this context was a clear declaration that He was claiming to be the Messiah.

#### THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT

To further appreciate the significance of the Lord’s statement, “I am the light of the world,” one must give careful consideration to the literary structure of the immediate context. As revealed in John 20:30, not everything that Jesus said and did was written in John’s account of the Gospel. However, what was written had a purpose, a purpose that was divinely different from Matthew, Mark, or Luke. Each of those Gospel accounts is organized in view of its theme and purpose, and designed to present Jesus to a particular audience. Within the confines of each book, there is a structure and thematic organization and arrangement of material designed to communicate an additional message beyond the basic content of any one story.

At first glance, it might appear that John 8:12 does not quite coincide with the verses prior to or following its placement. With the

exception of this one verse, nothing about a light, or any kind of illumination, is referenced in the entirety of these 59 verses. With the two main topics being the woman allegedly taken in adultery (Jn. 8:1-11), and second, the long exchange between Jesus and the Pharisees (Jn. 8:13-59), the statement, "I am the light of the world," seems oddly out of place. Nothing written by God, however, is out of place or out of order. Upon closer examination it can be realized that 8:12 is a pivotal passage for both chapters seven and eight, and for the story of the blind man told in chapter nine.

Beginning in John 7:1, a picture begins to unfold of those who are seeking to kill Jesus—their hearts are blinded by hatred. Spiritual blindness can also be detected among those who should have known Him the best; "For even his brethren did not believe on him" (Jn. 7:5). It is further stated that there was murmuring among the people about Him, with some even saying that "he deceiveth the people" (Jn. 7:12, KJV), and that He "hast a demon" (Jn. 7:20). Spiritual blindness led others to have a false view of the Messiah's appearance and self-disclosure (Jn. 7:25-27), and the place of His birth (Jn. 7:41-42, 52). Others still were so deeply blinded that they deliberately held up a woman to public scorn, not because they cared about justice, but because they were seeking to entrap Jesus and thereby find some means of accusing Him (Jn. 8:1-11). It was in this context of spiritual blindness, a woman marred by sin, and during one of the most celebrated feasts commemorating God (as represented by the light from the temple lamps), that Jesus uttered His immortal statement—"I am the light of the world." In that one statement, Jesus proclaimed His deity. He confessed that He was God and the giver of spiritual life. He thereby, in the midst of a people who were being misled by spiritually blind leaders, gave light to a path which would ultimately lead to freedom. This, however, did not rest well with the unbelieving Jews.

The significance of the Lord's statement as it pertained to His deity is obvious in light of the Pharisees' response which followed. They were fully aware that for one to say, "I am the light of the world," especially against the backdrop of the feast of tabernacles, was tantamount to saying, "I am God." To counter His claim they began quibbling about whether a claim could be true when based on self-testimony, and they failed to take into account the many other things which testified to His actually being God (e.g. the miracles). Regardless, "light cannot but attest to its own presence; otherwise put, it bears

witness to itself, and its source is entirely supportive of that witness.”<sup>6</sup> What results from the fact of this attestation is that those who reject Jesus as the Messiah would die in their sins (Jn. 8:21, 24). However, those who abandon their darkness by believing in Jesus could thereby know the truth—the truth that would set them free (Jn. 8:32).

The continuing quibbling of the unbelieving Jews (Jn. 8:33, 39, 41, 48, 52, 57) eventually led them to their attempted murder of Jesus (Jn. 8:58-59). Their hearts were so wretchedly blind that they could not even see the Messiah, though He was standing right in front of them. So blind had they become that the clear and unmistakable facts, such as the healing of the blind beggar (Jn. 9), were completely overlooked. Testimony from the now healed blind man, his parents, and other Pharisees who acknowledged the miracle (Jn. 9:16), were stubbornly rejected. Because of the hardness of their hearts, the unbelieving Jews turned a blind eye to truths that were so radiantly obvious—so obvious that a blind man could see it.

By contrast, the blind beggar of chapter nine had been made to see. The one who was *sent* by God, had *sent* the blind man to a pool with a name meaning “*sent*,” to wash away the clay and spittle placed on his eyes by Jesus. More than the gift of physical sight, this man had also been made to see spiritual sights. He came to “believe on the Son of God” (Jn. 9:35-38). His enlightened eyes brought about his confession and subsequent act of obeisance as revealed in the statement: “And he worshipped him” (Jn. 9:38).

For the blind beggar, the Lord’s proclamation about being the light of the world, took on a special meaning. To those unable to see God because of the dark and confused doctrines of the Pharisees, light was a welcome relief. To the woman “taken in adultery” (Jn. 8:3), the condemnation of sin’s dark consequences had been erased by the light of Christ’s forgiving words: “Neither do I condemn thee” (Jn. 8:11). For those who “believed on him” (Jn. 8:30), the light of Christ’s words enabled them to become true disciples. And, with all who follow His will, the light of Christ brings true and enduring freedom from the dark servitude of sin, and a brighter world of the life hereafter (Jn. 8:52).

### THE MODERN CONTEXT

While the darkness of sin existed during the time of Christ, it continues to permeate our modern era as well. With just a cursory glance at the news, it is evident that our world is filled with darkness.

Acts of terrorism, war, oppression, greed, extortion, and political chicanery continue to plague our modern society. In the media, pornography runs rampant, filthy language, and other acts of violence are portrayed as commonplace. In our homes, lives are starved because of divorce, abuse, and the evil effects of a humanistic society which has lost its values and mores. Like those mentioned in Ephesians 4:17-19, many are walking in darkness. Their understanding has been darkened, and their lives are filled with futility. They are alienated from the life of God and ignorant because of the blindness of their heart. They are past feeling and given over to lewdness, and thereby working all uncleanness with greediness. Certainly, little has changed in regard to the types of sin that have been committed over the past 2,000 years. Satan as the ruler of this world, continues in his relentless fight to acquire citizens for his dark kingdom. However, just as the light of Christ shined into a dark world some 2,000 years ago, His radiance continues to penetrate the lives of hardened sinners. By means of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, life and light can be brought to those harnessed by darkness. Truly, Jesus is the light of the world! He not only is the source of light which brings life (Jn. 8:12), but He is the one who can bring it abundantly (Jn. 10:10).

When by faith one becomes a disciple of the Lord and thereby embraces the light of the Gospel of Jesus, he or she is commanded to follow Christ. By following Christ, one must continue in the His word (Jn. 8:32), and in so doing, can be set free. As one continues to abide in the Word of Christ, he or she must "walk in the light" (1 Jn. 1:7), and continue to reflect the light of Christ (Phil. 2:15-16). As one who walks in the light, a Christian must also be a light to the world, and thereby bring glory to our Father who is in heaven (Mt. 5:14-16).

### CONCLUSION

As we consider the enormity of the Lord's statement in John 8:12, and the context in which it is found, may the words expressed in this portion of the lectureship book never become simply academic. Since Jesus truly *is* the light of the world, and since the whole world struggles in darkness, it behooves every one of us to take seriously our responsibility of preaching the Gospel message of life and light. Various friends, relatives, and neighbors of ours have been overpowered by the forces of darkness. Like the woman of John 8, their lives have been marred by sin. In seeing their plight, we must move beyond the

physical and see a soul that will inhabit eternity, an eternity that continues only in darkness for those who have never seen the light. Just as Paul was commissioned by the Lord to be a minister of the Gospel, and thereby open the eyes of sinners, turning them from darkness to light, so should we take seriously the great commission of preaching the Gospel to the whole world.

But arise, and stand upon thy feet: for to this end have I appeared unto thee, to appoint thee a minister and a witness both of the things wherein thou hast seen me, and of the things wherein I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom I send thee, o open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive remission of sins and an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in me (Acts 26:16-18).

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are taken from the American Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Jacobs, jewishencyclopedia.com, July 26, 2010, s.v. “tabernacles, feast of,” <<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp>>

<sup>3</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994), 223.

<sup>4</sup> <[www.cc-vw.org/sermons/john8:12](http://www.cc-vw.org/sermons/john8:12)>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), 339.

# “DARKNESS HATH BLINDED HIS EYES”

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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Light and darkness are not roommates; where one is, the other is not. Job was forced to “lay [his] hand upon [his] mouth” (Job 40:4) when, “out of the whirlwind” (Job 38:1), Jehovah cowed him into silence with a rapid-fire series of questions—the answers to which were at once both mundane and profound. “Where,” He asked, “is the way to the dwelling of light? And as for darkness, where is the place thereof, That thou shouldest take it to the bound thereof, And that thou shouldest discern the paths to the house thereof?” (Job 38:19-20). “God divided the light from the darkness” (Gen. 1:4); thus, when in the “house” of the one, we cannot be in the “house” of the other.

What is obvious and inviolable in the physical realm is equally so in the spiritual realm; yet, herein lies a problem. Christians are people whom God “called ... out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Pet. 2:9); but, this sadly does not prevent more than a few of them imagining that they can comfortably and simultaneously reside in the abodes of each. The “disciple whom Jesus loved” (Jn. 20:2) preached love and light, making it clear that their counterparts, hate and darkness, cannot be cohabiters. Of light and darkness, he said, “And this is the message which we have heard from him and announce unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in the darkness, we lie, and do not the truth” (1 Jn. 1:5-6). Linking the concepts of love and hate to light and darkness, he said:

He that saith he is in the light and hateth his brother, is in the darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is no occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in the darkness, and walketh in the darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because the darkness hath blinded his eyes (1 Jn. 2:9-11).

The implications and consequences of this matter are ponderous. One who loves his brother is a light dweller; a brother hater conversely is spiritually a cave dweller. He “walk[s] in the darkness” (1 Jn. 1:6), and cannot then “have fellowship with [God],” who only “is light” (1 Jn. 1:5). Because he is in darkness, the brother hater exacerbates his sin by yet claiming fellowship with God. He “lie[s]” and does “not the truth” (1 Jn. 1:6). Let us then examine this matter of love and light, and hate and darkness. We will examine our topic under the headings: 1) context, 2) concepts, 3) interconnection, 4) disjunction, and 5) cause. One loves his brother because he “abideth in the light”; and, one hates his brother because “the darkness hath blinded his eyes.”

### CONTEXT

We simply affirm that 1 John, along with the Gospel of John, the other two epistles of John, and Revelation were all written by the apostle John sometime in the second half of the first century—the last quarter of the first century, we think.

John’s account of the Gospel and his epistles focus on the historical Jesus, who was God “manifested in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16). The Revelation focuses on Jesus as “the Living one,” who once “was dead,” but who now is “alive for evermore, and [has] the keys of death and of Hades” (Rev. 1:18). He now “walketh in the midst of” the churches (Rev. 1:12-13, 20; 2:1, 5). He is a king on a “throne” (Rev. 3:21).

It is a cardinal doctrine of Christianity that the eternal “Word” was “with God” and “was God” (Jn. 1:1); and that the “the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us” (Jn. 1:14). Speaking of the incarnate “Word of life,” John spoke plainly of His time and space sojourn on planet Earth—“That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life” (1 Jn. 1:1). This doctrine is so fundamental to the faith, that “every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God” (1 Jn. 4:2), and only “deceivers ... confess not that Jesus Christ cometh in the flesh” (2 Jn. 7).

For man, whose sure home is the grave and dust (cf. Gen. 3:19; Heb. 9:27), equally fundamental is the doctrine that life is inherent in "the Word"; and, that that life "was," and is "the light of men" (Jn. 1:4). Indeed the Nazarene is our beacon leading us out of this benighted world. With infinite lumens, He came into the same world He had created (Jn. 1:3). "And the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness apprehended it not" (Jn. 1:5).

"Apprehend" is from a form of *katalambano* which is used in a variety of ways, two of which are: 1) to take hold of with the mind, and 2) to physically seize.<sup>2</sup> It is true that then and now, comparatively few people understand or comprehend, who Jesus is; but, given the overall context of the Gospel of John, the idea is that Jesus, the "Light," upon entering the world, could not be overpowered or squelched by the darkness. Vincent says:

... apprehended, i.e., grasped or seized, gives the correct idea, which appears in Joh 12:35, "lest darkness come upon you," i.e., overtake and seize. The word is used in the sense of laying hold of so as to make one's own; hence, to take possession of. Used of obtaining the prize in the games (1 Co 9:24); of attaining righteousness (Rom 9:30); of a demon taking possession of a man (Mar 9:18); of the day of the Lord overtaking one as a thief (1 Th 5:4). Applied to darkness, this idea includes that of eclipsing or overwhelming ... John's thought is, that in the struggle between light and darkness, light was victorious. The darkness did not appropriate the light and eclipse it.<sup>3</sup>

The poignant illustration of this is found in an event at the crucifixion. The gruesome event lasted six hours, three of which saw the land enshrouded in darkness. "And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour" (Mk. 15:33). Though a pitiful cry to the ears of men, Jesus was also paradoxically proclaiming victory over the darkness, when "at the ninth hour [He] cried with a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mk. 15:34). "Hast forsaken" is the aorist form of *egkatalaipo*, which means to leave behind or abandon.<sup>4</sup> It is used here in the aorist form, the preterit or simple past tense; thus, Jesus cried to the Father: "Why did you forsake me?" The physical darkness symbolized a spiritual horror that unfolded in realms unseen to man. God the Father, for the sins of men, forsook the Son; He purposely made Himself "far from helping" (Ps. 22:1) the

Saviour. The horror elicited this terrible cry; but, the cry was also ironically the Light's victorious declaration that "the darkness apprehended it not."

As an aside, albeit an essential one, the doctrine of the incarnation is not only cardinal, but practical and applicable. Life and light come as a set. Jesus is the Light, for, "In him was life" (Jn. 1:4). For he who is a child of God, the practical application of all this is that "Christ ... is our life" (Col. 3:4). Embracing this truth involves putting "to death" sins of the flesh and disposition (Col. 3:5-9), and "put[ting] on" things that are fitting with one's being "elect, holy and beloved" (Col. 3:12). The girdle that binds all these things together is "the bond of perfectness" (Col. 3:14). So pervasive is the principle, that Paul commands: "And whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col. 3:17).

In his Gospel account, John wrote extensively about light and darkness, and especially the Light's struggle with and defeat of the darkness. Of it all, John could say with passion and force: "And he that hath seen hath borne witness, and his witness is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye also may believe" (Jn. 19:35). In his epistles, then, he could say he had heard, seen, handled, touched, and beheld the "word of life" (1 Jn. 1:1). The Spirit of God chose the ideal man to talk to us about life and light; and, particularly talk to brethren, his "little children" (1 Jn. 2:1, *et al.*), not only about the cardinal doctrine of the incarnation, but also about light and darkness. Having seen the Lord triumphantly emerge from the forsaken darkness, the apostle of love later wrote often about this doctrine and its implications for our lives, especially the implications concerning our relationship with each other. One who hates his brother, he says, all the while claiming to walk in the light is destined to grope and stumble because "darkness hath blinded his eyes" (1 Jn. 2:11).

### CONCEPTS

The text in which our subject is embedded weaves together several significant concepts. Immediately we have: old commandment, new commandment; love and hate; light and darkness (1 Jn. 2:9-11). In the broader context, we have: fellowship—with God and one another—walking in the light; truth; sin, and sin cleansing blood; confession; forgiveness; advocate; propitiation; commandment and word keeping; and, the love of God (1 Jn. 1:3-2:5). Altogether, it is

quite an amazing compendium of concepts that are integral to our relationship to the "Word of life" (1 Jn. 1:1). Let us work from the broader to the more specific.

### *Fellowship*

This is the idea of relationship, communion, and joint participation. Fellowship is first God-ward. It is a state entered when a sinner is by God "begat ... again" (1 Pet. 1:3, 23; cf. Jn. 3:3-5). It is a relationship that must perpetually be guarded and maintained; it is conditional. It can be maintained only by doing "the truth," and walking in "the light" (1 Jn. 1:6-7). To do otherwise and claim "fellowship with him" is to "lie" (1 Jn. 1:6). Christians who are striving to maintain their fellowship with God have "fellowship one with another" (1 Jn. 1:7).

### *Walking*

The life we have in Christ is characterized in many ways, one of which is "walking." Nothing gave John greater joy than to hear of his "children walking in the truth" (3 Jn. 4; 2 Jn. 4), which is equivalent to "walk[ing] in the light" (1 Jn. 1:7). It accords with Paul's admonition that we "walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called" (Eph. 4:1), all of which underlies the fact that Christianity is "the Way" (Acts 24:22).

### *The Truth, The Word, Commandment, The Love Of God*

These are several in a litany of Scriptural designations for that specific, distinct, body of teaching upon which "the faith" (Ju. 3) is based. To hear some tell it, there is an incongruity, even antagonism, between the concepts of love and obedience; yet, according to John, doing the truth (1 Jn. 1:6), and keeping the word and the commandments (1 Jn. 2:5; 2:3) are inextricably linked to love (1 Jn. 2:5). Examining the books of Scripture the Spirit gave us *via* John, it is conspicuous that this man of love spoke dozens of times about the necessity of commandment-keeping. The fact is, reading The Book from cover-to-cover one will find that the only way by which he can show love for God is commandment-keeping.

### *Sin*

"[S]in is lawlessness" (1 Jn. 3:4), the "transgression of the law" (KJV). Law is logically prior to sin; sin presupposes law. Christians who say, "we have not sinned ... make him a liar" (1 Jn. 1:10). Man's pressing need is to be cleansed "from all sin" (1 Jn. 1:7-8). "[W]here there

is no law, neither is there transgression” (Rom. 4:15). Both before and after becoming Christians, we lived and live under the law of Christ (cf. Gal. 6:2).

*Sin Cleaning Blood, Confession, Forgiveness, Advocate, Propitiation*

John’s subjunctive concern was that his children, Christians, “may not sin” (1 Jn. 2:1); but, realizing we will always deal with sin, he allows: “And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” Once and for all Jesus was made the “propitiation” for the sins of all men. Christians who “walk in the light,” who “confess their sins,” have the promise that God will “forgive [their] sins” (1 Jn. 1:7, 9). The most precious commodity of all is “the blood of Jesus his Son,” for by it He “cleanseth us from all sin” (1 Jn. 1:7).

### **MORE IMMEDIATE TERMS**

*Old Commandment, New Commandment*

How can a commandment be characterized as “no new ... but an old ... [yet] a new” (1 Jn. 2:7-8)? The apostle is undoubtedly remembering and quoting the Master’s commandment: “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another” (Jn. 13:34). John’s “little children” had heard this old/new commandment “from the beginning” (1 Jn. 2:7); thus, John says, the new commandment “is true in him and in you” (1 Jn. 2:8).

The answer lies in the fact that the commandment to “love one another,” like inviolable monogamous marriage, is as old as the beginning (cf. Mt. 19:4ff); but, like marriage it was so long neglected and perverted that to return to the ideal was tantamount to its being new. It is a ...

[p]aradox, but truth. [It is] old in teaching (as old as the story of Cain and Abel ... but new in practice ... To walk as Christ walked is to put in practice the old commandment and so make it new (ever new and fresh), as love is as old as man and fresh in every new experience.<sup>5</sup>

Moses began to codify the already ancient obligation to love. Quoting Moses, Jesus cited the “great and first commandment” (Mt. 22:38) to “love the Lord thy God” (Mt. 22:37), and “a second ... love thy neighbor as thyself” (Mt. 22:39). He concludes: “On these two

commandments the whole law hangeth, and the prophets" (Mt. 22:40). Paul says that the only legitimate, ongoing, and unpaid debt is "to love one another," explaining, "he that loveth his neighbor hath fulfilled the law" (Rom. 13:8). "For this," he continued, "Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not covet, and if there be any other commandment, it is summed up in this word, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Rom. 13:9). Jesus brought out, dusted off, and even heightened this ancient obligation, saying: "[L]ove your enemies" (Mt. 5:44).

#### *Light And Darkness*

"Darkness ... consists in error and sin, as it exists outside the fellowship with God; [and] the light ... consists in truth and holiness, as it proceeds from Christ, who Himself is the true light."<sup>6</sup>

"God is light" (1 Jn. 1:5). More particularly, the eternal Word "was the true light, even the light which lighteth every man, coming into the world" (Jn. 1:9). Though "He was in the world," and "the world was made through him," the "world knew him not" (Jn. 1:10). Throughout the ages, the Maker of all things (cf. Jn. 1:3) was unrecognizable to men, because whereas He is light, "men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil" (Jn. 3:19). So dark, so benighted, was the world that John would say: "[T]he whole world lieth in the evil one" (1 Jn. 5:19). Yet, by His incarnation, His accomplished mission (cf. Jn. 19:30), and the work of the Spirit in impressing "the faith" once and for all upon this world (cf. Ju. 1:3; Book of Acts; Rom. 5:5; et. al.), we may now say, "darkness is passing away, and the true light already shineth" (1 Jn. 2:8).

It is not that darkness has dissipated, rather as John says, it "is passing away." The entire Christian Age, the period of Christ's present reign, will be characterized by an incessant struggle between light and darkness. Paul gives a list of prevalent sins that will pervade the "last days" (2 Tim. 3:1ff); yet, he notes that through it all, the "man of God" can prevail by God-breathed "scripture" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). It is, though, the case that the die has been cast; darkness lost the battle with the "sun of righteousness" (cf. Mal. 4:2), and will ultimately give way. The Lord's explanation of the "Parable of the Wheat and the Tares" emphasizes this very point:

The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and them that

do iniquity, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He that hath ears, let him hear (Mt. 13:41-43).

Rallied by this knowledge, this precious guarantee of victory, the child of God is nonetheless sobered by the reality that in the meantime there is a war—light versus darkness—and, there yet remains a long hard slog. Speaking of the already shining light, perhaps Robertson sums it up best, saying:

Is passing away [is a form of an] old verb, to lead by, to go by ... as in Matt. 20:30. Night does pass by even if slowly. See this verb in verse 17 of the world passing by like a procession. [In contrast, there is the true light which is] genuine, reliable, no false flicker. Already shineth [is] linear present active, “is already shining” and the darkness is already passing by. Dawn is here. Is John thinking of the second coming of Christ or of the victory of truth over error, of light over darkness (cf. Joh 1:5-9), the slow but sure victory of Christ over Satan as shown in the Apocalypse?<sup>7</sup>

We suggest that each of these is an integral element of the beautifully bolstering doctrine of the already shining light defeating the passing away darkness. This then brings us to John’s application of all these concepts.

#### *Love And Hate*

A light dweller “loveth his brother” (1 Jn. 2:10), but he who “hateth his brother is in the darkness” (1 Jn. 2:11). “Loveth” is a verb form of *agape*. This is the love based on value, will and choice. It impels one to do what is the absolute best for the object of his love; in this case, a person, a brother. *Agape* is fiercely loyal and devoted. It includes sentiment and feeling, but goes far beyond either. *Agape* does not “let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth” (1 Jn. 3:18). In James Bradley’s book, *Flags of Our Fathers*, he describes the process by which thousands of young Marines were trained for the Iwo Jima invasion. The force was comprised of men from all over, who, in normal walks of life, would have had nothing in common. Before it was over, these men were driven by what can only be called “love.”

The boys of Spearhead had been expertly trained for ten months. They were proficient in the techniques of war. But more

important, they were a team, ready to fight for one another. These boys were bonded by feelings stronger than they would have for any other humans in their life.<sup>8</sup>

Bradley pegs the meaning of *agape*.

"Hateth" is a verb form of *misein*. It is adapted as a prefix to some English words like "misogamy," hatred of marriage. *Misein* in the broadest sense is the absence of *agape*. Evil, it has been said, is "Good messed up"; and, so, we may say, "Hate is love messed up." As it applies to one's brother, hate manifests itself in many ways ranging from ignorance, apathy, selfishness, cowardice, all the way to open contempt and a desire to hurt.

In our text, the object of either love or hate is a "brother." We grant that the context rules in favor of this being a brother in Christ, but note that this does not exclude application to our fellow man. Only a brother lover can rightly claim light as his abode; but, a brother hater stumbles in darkness because the darkness has blinded him. Indeed, the darkness has so blinded him that he may say "he is in the light," when in reality he "is in the darkness even until now" (1 Jn. 2:9).

It is important, too, to notice that light is logically prior to love, and darkness logically prior to hate. Those who love do so because of their love of and allegiance to the light; those who hate do so because they are otherwise dabbling in and are influenced by the darkness.

### INTERCONNECTION

Having considered the meaning of several concepts, it is good to note how these concepts are related.

Some people, even some who are ostensibly Christians, just do not like to hear talk about obedience and commandment keeping. Such is their ignorance and aversion that they go so far as to pit these concepts against grace and love. Our text, though, makes it plain that such a bifurcation is absurd on the surface.

Limiting ourselves to the epistles of John, let us consider several general facts:

- Thirteen times John uses various forms of the word commandment (1 Jn. 2:3-4, 7-8; 3:22-24; 4:21; 5:2-3; 2 Jn. 1:4-6).
- At least six times he makes mention of the word (1 Jn. 1:1; 2:7, 14).

- Three times he uses the word teaching (2 Jn. 1:9-10; “doctrine,” KJV).
- Twice speaks of the will of God (1 Jn. 2:17).
- Upwards of ten times he speaks of the truth (1 Jn. 1:6, 8; 2:4, 21; 3:19; 5:7; 2 Jn. 1; 3 Jn. 4, 8, 12).
- Five times the apostle says we are to keep commandments, and/or the word (1 Jn. 2:3-5; 3:22, 24; 5:3, 18).
- Just as he several times speaks of our abiding in God and Jesus, so he speaks of our abiding “in Him (God),” “the Son,” “the light,” “love,” and “the teaching of Christ” (1 Jn. 2:6, 10, 24; 4:16; 2 Jn. 9-10).

For added measure, we are, he says, to do “the will of God,” and “the truth” (1 Jn. 2:17; 1:6), in which, he also says we are to walk (2 Jn. 4, 6; 3 Jn. 3-4).

What must not be missed is that “love one another” (cf. 1 Jn. 3:11; 4:7, 11-12) is a commandment. It is in the Word. It is the will of God. It is a part of the teaching of Christ; it is the Truth. This passage gives the lie to the man-made “wall of separation” between grace and love, and keeping, obeying, and doing God’s commandments, word, and will. It also gives the lie to the generally unspoken, yet implied, belief that doctrine and commandments are limited to things like the plan of salvation, church organization, acts of worship, and so on. People who disobey, or otherwise give short shrift to the commandment to “love one another” are people who “transgresseth” (2 Jn. 9, KJV). They compound their sin by claiming to be in “the light.” One who claims to know God while failing to obey His commandment to love his brother is a “liar” (1 Jn. 2:4).

### DISJUNCTION

As darkness is to light (and vice versa), so is hate to love (and vice versa). As noted, to claim fellowship with God, who is “light,” all the while walking in darkness is a horrible lie. Where light is, there can be “no darkness at all” (1 Jn. 1:5). Absence of one implies the presence of the other; and, the presence of one implies the other is absent.

Light is the purview of love; and, darkness the purview of hate. The absence of one implies the presence of the other; and, the presence of one implies the absence of the other. In other words, if one does not

love his brother, then hate is present. It is a short leap from ambivalence toward a brother to contempt and open hostility.

### CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE

A light dweller loves his brother and "there is no occasion of stumbling in him" (1 Jn. 2:10). When one lives out in the light, out in the open, when his words and motives are clear and for all to see, when his conduct is honorable; then, that is a person who will not meet himself coming, or have to equivocate or explain away any of his actions. Light causes one to love; and, the combination of light and love make for a sure and steady life.

One who "hateth his brother" (1 Jn. 2:9) is in the darkness, and he does not know "whither he goeth, because the darkness hath blinded his eyes" (1 Jn. 2:11). Darkness is the cause of hate; and, hate results in one's lack of sure direction, even to the point of irrationality. "How," we often ask, "do otherwise bright people convince themselves that prohibitions against slander, evil surmising, malice, and so on do not apply to themselves?" They are blinded by forces of darkness. Why were some of the Christians in Corinth openly joining parties and pledging allegiance to men? They were "walk[ing] after the manner of men" (1 Cor. 3:3). Your writer was once given a copy of a portion of a "blog" in which a person to whom he has not spoken in years was affirming all sorts of actions and motives. Each was/is untrue. Reading the less than flattering description, your writer wondered, and wonders: "What would he have written if he just admitted that he hates me?"

### CONCLUSION

How does one keep, do, abide, and walk in the commandments, will of God, the teaching of Christ, and the Truth in regard to loving one's brother? It is typical when it comes to the topic of love to hear people: 1) speak in indefinite sentimental terms, or 2) go into a *it does not mean "X" mode*. A great, and late, Gospel preacher and teacher once lamented at how expert we have become in explaining what things *do not* mean and never get around to explaining what they *do* mean and how they apply.

What shall we conclude relative to the meaning and application of the "new commandment" to "love one another," and the Lord's affirmation, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (Jn. 13:34-35)? To hear some tell it, two people speaking the name of Jesus and embracing one another must be

Christians; but, others are only slightly more helpful. Surely obeying, keeping, an imperative of the Savior cannot be that elusive. Inspiration's description of the "most excellent way" (1 Cor. 12:31; 13:4-7) can serve as a most excellent self-examination.

Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things (1 Cor. 13:4-7).

These are not ambiguous terms. "God is love; and he that abideth in love abideth in God" (1 Jn. 4:16). We are to be "imitators of God" (Eph. 5:1). In the 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 above, replace the word "love" with "I," and affirm: 1) I suffer long, 2) I do not envy, 3) I do not vaunt myself, 4) I am not puffed up, 5) I do not behave myself unseemly, 6) I do not seek my own, 7) I am not provoked, 8) I do not take account of evil, 9) I do not rejoice in unrighteousness, 10) I rejoice with the truth, 11) I bear all things, 12) I believe all things—i.e., I think the best of people unless they compel me to think otherwise, 13) I hope all things and, 14) I endure all things.<sup>9</sup> If each of these is not generally true, or you are not working hard to make each true, then you are not keeping the commandments of Jesus. If you refuse or fail to keep the commandments of Jesus, you do not "love" Him (cf. Jn. 14:15). The consequences of this disobedience are clear: "If any man loveth not the Lord, let him be anathema. Maranatha" (1 Cor. 16:22). "Maranatha"—O, Lord come—is only a meaningful cry for one who "abideth in the light" (1 Jn. 2:10). A light dweller is one that "loveth his brother." A non-lover of his brother is destined to stumble and grope. He is yet in darkness, and the darkness has blinded his eyes.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are taken from the American Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> J.H. Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), 332-33.

<sup>3</sup> Marvin R. Vincent, *Vincent's Word Studies*, (E-Sword, Version 9.0.2), Jn. 1:5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>5</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), VI., 211.

<sup>6</sup> H.A.W. Meyer, *Meyer's Commentary on the New Testament*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1983), X, 509.

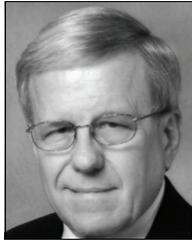
<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>8</sup> James Bradley, *Flags of Our Fathers*, (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 2001), 120.

<sup>9</sup> I believe I first saw this arrangement in a book by G. Campbell Morgan.

# “THE ARMOUR OF LIGHT”

*Tom L. Bright*



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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

This is one among many lessons in this lectureship designed to encourage us, and to remind us how, to “walk in the light” (1 Jn. 1:7). The title of this chapter is taken from Paul’s exhortation to the Roman Christians wherein he encouraged them to “cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light” (Rom. 13:12).

Based upon the lectureship’s theme, a great deal will be said in these lessons about the words “light” and “darkness.” On occasions, Inspiration used these words figuratively to direct our attention to that which is pleasing, or as the case may be, displeasing to God. The Bible uses the word “light” in reference to that which is *good, righteous, pure, and holy*. The Holy Spirit also used the word “darkness” to identify that which is *evil, unrighteous, impure, and unholy*.

A classic example of the figurative use of the two words to distinguish between *good* and *evil* is seen in John’s first epistle. He wrote: “If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 Jn. 1:6-7). Without doubt, no person reading this passage would think John is writing of daylight and nighttime. When one walks “in the light,” he is pleasing to God. When one walks “in darkness,” the opposite is true.

Jesus informed Saul of Tarsus that one aspect of the mission He had for him was: “To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified

by faith that is in me" (Acts 26:18). Here *darkness* is equal to *the power of Satan*, and *light* is parallel to the words *unto God*.

Peter used the two words in the same way when he wrote: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). Through the Gospel, they were called out of the spiritual *darkness* of all that is opposed to "the right ways of the Lord" (Acts 13:10). The phrase, "his marvellous light," points us to Jesus' statement: "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness" (Jn. 12:46). Thus, there can be no doubt relative to Peter's statement.

John, "the apostle of love," said:

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God (Jn. 3:19-21).

We see then, in this lectureship the two words will be used figuratively to suggest that which God approves or that which is unacceptable to Him.

### LET US CAST OFF ... LET US PUT ON

In our text, Paul said: "The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light" (Rom. 13:12). We are to cast off the "works of darkness." When we have done this, the job is only half done. We are to *put on* "the armour of light." That area of our affections which the *works of darkness* once occupied is not to be left unattended. We are to add in its place the *armour of light*.

#### *Works Of Darkness*

The *works of darkness* are those works which emanate from those dominated by that which is comprehended in the word "darkness." It is "the world" which we are not to love (1 Jn. 2:15-17). It is the one in whom the concept of being "filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18) has no place. This is the opposite of the one who has the Word of Christ dwelling in him richly (Col. 3:16). Collectively, these are not "followers of God, as dear children" (Eph. 5:1).

According to the next verse (Rom. 13:13), the infamous “works of darkness” are six in number. Paul lists them as *rioting*, *drunkenness*, *chambering*, *wantonness*, *strife*, and *envying*. Surely none would argue that these six sins comprise the totality of the “works of darkness.”

The fact is, five of the original words Paul used here are also found in that nefarious list he identified as the “works of the flesh” (Gal. 5:19-21). The original words rendered “rioting,” “wantonness,” “strife,” and “envying” in our text are translated “revelling,” “lasciviousness,” “variance,” and “emulations” respectively, in Galatians 5:19-21. The same word is rendered “drunkenness” in both lists, while the word translated “chambering” in our text is not found in the Galatians list.

The reader should remember that Paul concluded his “works of the flesh” list with the words, “and such like.” Thus, the word translated “chambering” would be categorized under the heading of fornication, thus a part of this despicable group.

Therefore, in encouraging his readers to “cast off the works of darkness,” Paul told them to rid themselves of those “works of the flesh,” which entangle one’s soul, prevent Christian growth, and will ultimately lead to eternal destruction.

#### *The Armour Of Light*

Paul tells us what we are to use to fill the void left in our affections when we cast off the “works of darkness.” He encourages us to take those weapons made available by Him Who is the Light.

Here, Paul’s words remind us of his short, yet stately and imposing, treatise on “the whole armour of God” (Eph. 6:10-17). When one grasps the fact we are at war with the evil machinations of Satan, with all his deceit of unrighteousness, he appreciates even more the appeal of this battle-scarred veteran of the cross to put on God’s armor.

It is not uncommon for Paul to write of the Christian’s life and service to Christ in military terms (2 Cor. 10:4; 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 2:3; 4:7). However, the war in which we find ourselves is totally different from the carnal wars man has waged throughout history. Isaiah prophesied of this different nature of warfare more than seven hundred years before Christ. In his prophecy of the coming kingdom of heaven, which is the New Testament church, he wrote: “And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war

any more” (Isa. 2:4). This passage does not, in any sense of the word, predict a millennial reign of Christ, as per the false and ungodly doctrine of premillennialism. Rather, it focuses upon the *nature of the warfare* which would be waged. This same prophet said: “For thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream: then shall ye suck, ye shall be borne upon her sides, and be dandled upon her knees” (Isa. 66:12).

The soldiers of Christ will not hear the beating of drums, witness massive troop movements for the advantage of surprise, nor engage the enemy with arrows, spears, or swords. They will be immersed in a totally different type of war, a war which demands a change in strategy, tactics, and weapons. Paul said:

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:3-5).

This warfare is not imperialist in nature, that is, our goal is not to make territorial acquisitions. God’s people fight to win the hearts of men, and to present ourselves holy and acceptable at the feet of Him Who is over all.

### THE ARMOUR OF GOD

In the closing verses of the Ephesian letter, Paul encourages his readers to “be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might” (Eph. 6:10). He then instructs them how to do such, writing: “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (v. 11). The armor of God refers to that which God has provided for his soldiers (saints) so they might *withstand* and *stand*. All of the armor God provides is needed. Donning only a portion of God’s armor leaves one in the unenviable position of lacking the needed weapons to successfully fight the spiritual warfare in which we find ourselves. Since all of the items listed by Paul in this passage are crucial, let us look more closely at them.

The whole of God’s armor is needed so we “may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:11). The word “wiles” is most interesting. About it, Thayer says: “1. to follow up or investigate by method and settled plan; 2. to follow craftily, frame devices, deceive ...

*cunning arts, deceit, craft, trickery.*”<sup>2</sup> Dealing with the word “wiles,” Cremer informs:

... the following or pursuing of orderly and technical procedure in the handling of a subject; ‘*methodeuo*,’ to go systematically to work, to do or pursue something methodically and according to the rules of art ... overreaching, cunning, trickery world., as it appears only in Eph. iv.14, vi.11.<sup>3</sup>

Vincent states the original word “means a deliberate planning or system.”<sup>4</sup> It is thought provoking when we understand our English word “method” comes from the same root word. These definitions set forth a principle that is sometimes overlooked in our studies of the “Christian Armor.” Simply stated, they all affirm that Satan *thinks, plans, schemes, and devises*. In short, our archenemy has intelligence. With purpose and aforethought, he lays out strategies and plans in his desire to lead us astray. The Bible does not give credence to the kind of “devil” conjured up by man in order to scare children. There is a devil. He is real. He wants our souls, and he schemes to have his way.

In Ephesians 6:11, Paul pronounces his agreement with a previous point in this lesson, the nature of our warfare is different. Our wrestling and our struggles are not against flesh and blood, “but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” Satan has his minions, his puppets through which he works out his scandalous deeds. There is not one place in all of our existence upon the earth wherein these wicked pawns cannot be found. Thus, the injunction to take up all the armor God provides for us, so we might *stand* and *withstand* in the evil day (v. 13).

The power of Satan is very real and far reaching. However, he cannot wield over us a power which is beyond our ability to resist. In this, the apostle Paul is very firm. He wrote: “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:13). The devil must be resisted “stedfast in the faith” (1 Pet. 5:9, cf. Jas. 4:7).

Any wise combatant will strive to know the strength and weaknesses of his adversary. It should be no different in the war being waged for the souls of man today. Although Satan can use various

nuances of the strategies he employs, Inspiration does inform us of his tactics.

Paul told the Corinthians: “Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Cor. 2:11). Concerning the word translated “devices,” Thayer observes: “1. a mental perception, thought. 2. spec. (an evil) purpose.”<sup>5</sup> Let us look at some of these devices, these mental perceptions, these evil purposes that our chief adversary incorporates into his schemes to turn us away from the Truth.

Satan *beguiles* and uses *subtilty* (2 Cor. 11:3). He employs *deceit* (Rev. 12:9; Heb. 3:12-13). Satan *bewitches* (Gal. 3:1), utilizes *vanity* (2 Pet. 2:18; Eph. 4:17), and diabolical *snares* (1 Tim. 6:9; 2 Tim. 2:25-26). When we add to all this the fact that Paul spoke of “the messenger of Satan” (2 Cor. 12:7), we see that Satan has a wide array of weapons in his arsenal. In order to combat this daunting foe, God has provided us with that by which we can overcome. Let us look at the individual items of “armour of God.”

#### *Loins Girt About With Truth*

The word “loins” has reference to the waist and hips. Barnes says: “The ‘girdle’ seems sometimes to have been a cincture of iron or steel, and designed to keep every part of the armor in its place, and to gird the soldier on every side.”<sup>6</sup> Rienecker adds:

The Roman soldiers wore one of at least three wide belts or girdles. The breech-like leather apron worn to protect the lower abdomen or the sword-belt which was buckled on together with the sword as the decisive step in the process of preparing one’s self for battle and the special belt or sash designating an officer or high official.<sup>7</sup>

We can see the wisdom of the loins being gird with *Truth*, since the belt which was worn served as a foundation to which other elements of the armor were attached. “[T]he word of the truth of the gospel” (Col. 1:5) is that which has been miraculously revealed, miraculously confirmed, and which inspired penmen have written down for subsequent generations. Thus, every succeeding generation can read and understand the Truth.

Campbell wrote:

Often have I said, and often have I written, that truth, truth eternal and divine, is now, and long has been with me the pearl of great price. To her I will, with the blessing of God, sacrifice

everything. But on no altar will I offer her a victim. If I have lost sight of her, God who searcheth the hearts knows I have not done it intentionally. With my whole heart I have sought the truth, and I know that I have found it.<sup>8</sup>

We must be sure this describes our attitude toward God's Truth. It—and It alone—can save. Anything more than this is too much, and anything less is not enough.

*The Breastplate Of Righteousness*

Barnes describes the “breastplate” as:

... the armor that covered the body from the neck to the thighs, and consisted of two parts, one covering the front and the other the back. It was made of rings, or in the form of scales, or of plates, so fastened together that they, would be flexible, and yet guard the body from a sword, spear, or arrow.<sup>9</sup>

Rienecker adds:

The word denotes a piece of armor that can mean everything that was worn at different periods to protect the body between the shoulders and the loins. The average Roman soldier wore a piece of metal, but those who could afford it used the very best available: a scale or chain mail that covered chest and hips.<sup>10</sup>

Based on these thoughts, we easily recognize the importance of this part of the soldier's armament. Just as this breastplate protected the Roman soldier in times of conflict, so shall God's bulwark of righteousness protect us when trials and temptations beset us from all sides.

The word “righteousness,” according to Salmond, “is to be understood as that of apposition or identity, as the breastplate which is righteousness.”<sup>11</sup> Bauer-Danker says: “The quality or characteristic of upright behavior, *uprightness*, *righteousness*.”<sup>12</sup> Clarke offers the following incisive thoughts:

The word righteousness, *dikaisune*, we have often had occasion to note, is a word of very extensive import: it signifies the principle of righteousness; it signifies the practice of righteousness, or living a holy life; it signifies God's method of justifying sinners; and it signifies justification itself. Here it may imply a consciousness of justification through the blood of the cross; the principle of righteousness or true holiness implanted in the heart; and a holy life, a life regulated according to the testimonies of God. As the breast-plate defends the heart and lungs, and all those vital functionaries that are contained in what is called the

region of the thorax; so this righteousness, this life of God in the soul of man, defends every thing on which the man's spiritual existence depends.<sup>13</sup>

One is *righteous* because his sins have been forgiven. Being thus decreed as "right with God," the Christian must maintain that state of "rightness with Jehovah." When this becomes our aim, goal, and purpose, we have taken up for ourselves this "breastplate of righteousness." Peter told his readers to resist the Devil "stedfast in the faith" (1 Pet. 5:8-9). When we strive to "be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18), by letting "the word of Christ dwell in" us richly (Col. 3:16), we have donned our Christian armor.

*Feet Shod With The Preparation Of The Gospel Of Peace*

In Ephesians 6:15, Paul urged the Ephesian Christians to take to themselves that state of preparedness which the Gospel of peace provides. Some have suggested the apostle was telling his readers to always be prepared to preach the Gospel of Christ. Undoubtedly, our Lord wants us always ready to preach and teach the Word of God in all of its purity. However, this concept does not touch on the overall theme of this section, that is, of putting on the armor provided by God to withstand the wiles of the devil and then to stand. However, if we look at this as Paul encouraging a state of constant preparedness that comes from the Gospel of peace, it agrees perfectly.

This agrees with many other passages which address the same thought. Paul wrote: "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong" (1 Cor. 16:13). He encouraged the Thessalonian Christians: "Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thess. 5:6). Peter told his readers: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8), and Paul admonished: "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12).

In the upper room, before his arrest, Jesus said: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (Jn. 14:27). What man could give this "unworldly" peace that Jesus mentions? No one except the "only begotten Son" of God (Jn. 3:16). Isaiah said the Christ would be called, among many things, "The Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6). Peter told those of Cornelius' household: "The word which God sent

unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)" (Acts 10:36). We need to realize, even though we are in a constant war with evil, our message is one of *peace*. Even though it is our responsibility to "live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12:18), the peace for which we contend is that for which all should strive to gain—"peace with God" (Rom. 5:1). It is truly, "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding" (Phil. 4:7).

When the heavenly host announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds, Luke records: "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Lk. 2:13-14). The "peace" here is Gospel "peace." Also, it is God's "good will" toward mankind in the person of Jesus Christ that is here contemplated. No wonder the angels said: "Glory to God in the highest"!

On one occasion, Jesus said: "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God" (Mt. 5:9). The "peacemaker" here is the preacher of peace. It is not the one who works as an intercessor between labor and management. It is the person who strives to bring to his fellow man the only message existing which will result in man being at peace with the Sovereign Ruler of the universe.

#### *The Shield Of Faith*

Paul writes: "Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." (Eph. 6:16) The words "above all" do not imply that the shield of faith is more important than the other items listed. Rather, it suggests that in addition to the items already mentioned, one should also include the "shield of faith." A similar use of the two words is seen in Paul's exhortation: "And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness" (Col. 3:14). "Charity" is a part of all that Paul encouraged in that section of Scripture. However, it is not the most important item. Paul is saying: "And above all these things put on charity."

The "shield" here considered refers to "the great oblong shield, or *scutum*, which covers the whole body."<sup>14</sup> Rienecker adds:

It refers to the large door-shaped shield in contrast to the small round convex shield. The reference is to the Roman soldiers *scutum* which had an iron frame and sometimes a metal boss in the center at the front. Often the several layers of leather were soaked in water before the battle in order to put out the incendiary missiles of the enemy.<sup>15</sup>

For the Christian, it is the “shield of faith.” The question here is: “Does this refer to my personal faith or to that body of doctrine referred to as ‘the faith’ (Ju. 3, Acts 6:7; Eph. 4:5)?” It is my conviction this refers to the former, that is, the degree of faith a person possesses. The depth of one’s faith determines the faithfulness of that person.

For instance, the Bible speaks of the different *degrees of faith* which man can possess. Negatively speaking, one may have *little faith* (Mt. 6:30), *no faith* (Mk. 4:40), *vain faith* (1 Cor. 15:17), or a *shipwrecked faith* (1 Tim. 1:19). In a positive way, Inspiration speaks of *great faith* (Mt. 15:28), *steadfast faith* (Col. 2:5), *saving faith* (Lk. 7:50), and *unfeigned faith* (2 Tim. 1:5). John added the important thought: “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 Jn. 5:4).

There can be no doubt, our personal faith in the Lord has much to do with the life we live before God. Therefore, it is conclusive that this is what Paul had under consideration. None can deny that a strong faith wins battles, and we are in a battle for the eternal destiny of our own soul.

In that day and time, there was the distinct possibility that the opposing army one could face might have the capability of hurling “fiery darts” at them. Barnes says:

The fiery darts that were used in war were small, slender pieces of cane, which were filled with combustible materials, and set on fire; or darts around which some combustible material was wound, and which were set on fire, and then shot “slowly” against a foe.<sup>16</sup>

The “fiery darts” with which we must contend today are not physical in nature, but they are just as real, and just as destructive. The enemy of all righteousness can only enter our life by marching down the avenues of “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 Jn. 2:16). Certainly, he makes use of sub-divisions of each of these. Because that is so, we must strive to know the trickery and deceit Satan is capable of using in his efforts to bring about our eternal destruction.

#### *The Helmet Of Salvation*

In his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul used the expression, “for an helmet, the hope of salvation” (1 Thess. 5:8). I am convinced that the same thought is found in our text. “Salvation” is a promise of

something better in our future. We desire the thing promised and believe that He Who has promised also has the ability to deliver. In reality, *hope* can be defined as “desire plus expectation.”

It seems improbable to me the phrase, “the helmet of salvation,” follows hard upon the words, “the shield of faith,” by coincidence. There is a direct connection between the concept of *faith* and *hope*. In fact, without *faith* there can be no *hope*. Paul explained that *hope* is the desire for that which we do not possess when he wrote: “For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it” (Rom. 8:24-25). Yet, in order to *desire* something, we must first hear of it, and second, we must believe in the veracity of the desired thing. In other words, there must be sufficient proof that the thing desired exists, and one must have the conviction that the one who has promised the desired thing has the wherewithal to bring it about. This produces *hope*.

As our faith deepens, our *hope* will also increase. In other words, when we believe even more deeply in the things we previously accepted, to that degree our *hope* will also become greater.

For example, let us consider the virgin birth of Christ. The result of it was “God with us” (Mt. 1:23). John said it this way: “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (Jn. 1:14). When we take into account that “the Word,” which became flesh, was in the beginning, “the Word,” which became flesh, was with God, and “the Word,” which became flesh, was God (Jn. 1:1), it is an impressive thought. What was God’s purpose for this? The salvation of mankind! Jesus said: “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Lk. 19:10). John, who is often called “the apostle of love,” wrote: “For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved” (Jn. 3:17).

When we meditate upon the fact of God’s great love for fallen man, which is evidenced by what He has done to offer salvation to mankind, our faith grows stronger. Subsequently, our hope likewise becomes greater.

We all realize that, regardless of the area of life which is under consideration, when *hope* is removed from a person, all is lost. Any existence without hope is as dark and dreary as it can be. A hopeless people is a pathetic sight to see.

Without the *hope of salvation*, all our efforts would be without purpose. If there is no hope, why should we live “soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Tit. 2:12)? What would be the purpose of resisting the devil (Jas. 4:7)? If there is no hope, why not just “eat, drink, and be merry” (Lk. 12:19)? *Salvation*, and all that pertains to it, should be that which always stands before us—inspiring, motivating, and galvanizing us to “lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1). The great desire for something better, and a reasonable expectation of receiving it, has the power to motivate a person far beyond that which they might think possible.

#### *The Sword Of The Spirit*

In this beautiful picture painted by the apostle Paul, he comes to the last figure drawn from the Roman soldier’s armament—the sword. Of all the various items of armor alluded to in these verses, this—the sword—is the only offensive weapon. Authorities agree that the Roman soldier also carried a spear. The reason why Paul did not list a spear is a matter about which we can only speculate.

However, there is one thing we do know. The sword is the only offensive weapon needed in the spiritual battle which is waging on every side. Paul argued:

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do (Heb. 4:12-13).

The basic thought expressed here is that the Word of God is *all-sufficient*. Paul affirmed that the Scriptures are all-sufficient when he declared that with them “the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:17). The word translated “perfect” is not used here in reference to a sinless life. Rather, it suggests that which is complete, lacking nothing, all-sufficient. Everything God wants His people to be is revealed in His inspired Word.

Peter wrote: “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever.

Amen” (2 Pet. 3:18). One does this by honest study, and the application, of those things revealed in God’s Word. If one is “poor in spirit” (Mt. 5:3), that is, if his attitude is that of one who realizes he is the creature standing before the Creator, and that he is one in need of direction and guidance, he will have that growth Peter exhorts us to have. When one who is truly humble in the presence of His God approaches the task of living a life truly separated from the world, he will produce the “fruit of the spirit” (Gal. 5:22).

### THE CHANGE AGENTS

In the first part of the last century several troubles afflicted the New Testament church. They were problems centered on various issues. These included the number of drinking vessels to be used in the communion, Bible classes, women teachers in Bible classes, eating in the building, located preachers, and the ungodly doctrine of Premillennialism. In the 1950s, there arose another problem dealing with the work of the church in the area of benevolence. That controversy spread to the “how” of supporting preachers in the mission field.

A negative, adverse response to this divineness had, at least in part, a counterproductive impact on the Lord’s church which resulted in another schism in the Lord’s body. Also, considering that existentialism, pragmatism, and the Hegelian Dialecticism were introduced into our education system through the efforts of John Dewey and others in the early part of the twentieth century, we see the foundation for another “ism” within our ranks—“*liberalism*.”

It is not uncommon to hear the word “liberal” and/or any number of its derivations used to describe politicians, educators, the judiciary, and others. However, as it relates to the New Testament church, it must be asked: “What is meant by the term ‘liberal’?” First, it must be noted that a *liberal giver*, i.e., one who is liberal with his time and/or money relative to the work of the church, is not here considered. Here, our answer to the above question focuses on the term “liberal” as it is used in reference to those who advocate an uninhibited freedom of thoughts and/or actions *beyond that which the Bible allows*, and thus results in doctrines and practices contrary to God’s will.

A basic philosophy of “change” has grown out of this liberalism. Those advocating this view have correctly been dubbed as “Change Agents.” In their mind, anything and everything which makes the church of Christ what it is, must be changed. Every item once held as

a fundamental of faith has now been placed in the *liberals*’ cross hairs of “*It must be changed.*” Despite their repeated denials to the contrary, the actions of the liberals prove they want *change*, and more often than not, they want it *just for the sake of change*. The “Change Agents” are not in agreement on every item which must be changed, but one thing is certain, *change there will be!*

Those leading the charge in this unscriptural “Movement for Change” are many, far too numerous to mention here. However, among most infamous liberal “Change Agent” leaders, the names Rubel Shelly, Max Lucado, Jeff Walling, Larry West, and Doug Foster resonate with informed brethren. Other individuals who have demonstrated their strong advocacy for illegitimate change include: Carroll D. Osbourn, C. Leonard Allen, Bill Love, Randy Harris, F. LaGard Smith, Joe Beam, Prentice Meador, Mike Armour, Marvin Phillips, Terry Rush, Calvin Warpula, and Buddy Bell.

As noted, there is no consensus among the “Change Agents” relative to what must be changed. However, in the view of most “Change Agents,” changes are necessary because: 1) The church is too negative, dogmatic, and exclusivistic, 2) The church does not know the meaning of grace, 3) The church is legalistic, pharisaical, and judgmental, 4) The church must have a “New Hermeneutic,” 5) The church is merely one among many denominations, 6) Where the Scriptures are silent we may act and speak as we see fit, 7) *A capella* congregational singing in worship is not obligatory, 8) A sinner does not need to know the Scriptural purpose of baptism, 9) There are faithful saints scattered among the denominations, 10) We should recognize denominational members as brethren, thus we should fellowship the denominations, 11) We mistreat women by forbidding them to occupy leadership roles, 12) God’s marriage law has numerous exceptions and loopholes, 13) The practice of giving “book, chapter, and verse” for what is preached and practiced is passe, 14) Opposition to “social drinking” is a mistake, 15) More emphasis on the “social nature,” rather than the “spiritual nature,” of the work of the church is needed, 16) There is no such thing as an “act” of worship, 17) Worship is solely a matter of “attitude,” 18) There is no inspired instruction relative to when we are to observe the Lord’s Supper, 19) God gives spiritual guidance to the individual through his emotions, not just through the Word, 20) There needs to be much more tolerance shown toward “theistic evolutionist,” and 21) Elders, except for their example, have no authority whatsoever.

Time and space forbids the naming of every person involved in today's liberal apostasy. As the *changers* change from day-to-day, it is difficult to know exactly what the specifics of their agenda are at any given moment. However, their basic philosophy (i.e., *working to change* the Lord's church) *does not change*.

Leaders among the "Change Agents," as well as other liberal false teachers, have platforms provided for them by many of "our" colleges (such as Lubbock Christian University, Abilene Christian University, Harding University, Pepperdine University, and David Lipscomb University) and "our" schools of preaching (such as Sunset International Bible Institute).

Other platforms for the advancement of the "Change Agents" agenda include the *Christian Chronicle* and *ACU Press*. The *Christian Chronicle* is owned and published by Oklahoma Christian University. *ACU Press* is owned by Abilene Christian University and it primarily publishes books advocating the "Change Agent" doctrine. It is noteworthy that many of the books published by *ACU Press* have been (and are) written by current ACU professors.

### CONCLUSION

In order for God to use us in this generation, we must be willing to make use of that which He has provided for His army. Paul wrote: "The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light" (Rom. 13:12). I am the only one who can take up these weapons, this armor of light, for myself. This is something that cannot be done by proxy. When I have done as Paul instructs in Romans 13:12 and Ephesians 6:11-17, I will be able to withstand the devil's wiles in the evil day, and having done that, I will be able to stand firm against the onslaught of the trials and temptations he will use to turn aside the children of God.

Let us encourage each other to take up the "armour of light" in this great war in which we find ourselves. Satan wants our hearts, our minds, and our souls. With all the armor our Commander has provided, we can *stand* and *withstand*.

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are taken from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Electronic Database by BibleWorks, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Hermann Cremer, *Biblio-Theological Lexicon of New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh, UK: T & T Clark, 1954), 444-445.

<sup>4</sup> Marvin Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969), 3:392.

<sup>5</sup> Thayer.

<sup>6</sup> Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Bible*, Electronic Database by E-Sword, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), 541.

<sup>8</sup> Alexander Campbell, *A Demand for Justice from Editors in General and Mr. Brantley in Particular*, *Millennial Harbinger* 1 (1830), 97, as quoted by William Blake, *Alexander Campbell, Apostle of Truth*, <<http://www.dabar.org/SemReview/Volume06/issue1/V6I1A2.htm>>

<sup>9</sup> Barnes.

<sup>10</sup> Rienecker and Rogers, 541-542.

<sup>11</sup> S.D.F. Salmond, *The Expositor's Greek Testament, The Epistle to the Ephesians* Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 386.

<sup>12</sup> Frederick William Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Electronic Database, BibleWorks. 1992-2005.

<sup>13</sup> Adam Clark, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Electronic Database, E-sword, Copyright 2000-2005 by Rick Meyers.

<sup>14</sup> Clark.

<sup>15</sup> Rienecker, 542.

<sup>16</sup> Barnes.

# “THE FATHER OF LIGHTS”

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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

If you have ever been camping at night, then you are familiar with a flashlight. One strange thing about flashlights is that the beam always contains a shadow. Some of the newer flashlights have a focus mechanism. One may intensify the light, but can still always see a few veins of shadow running through it. This always puzzled me as a boy, because I expected the light coming out of my flashlight to be perfect, containing no shadow. However, imperfections in the light source cast these shadows in the beam, and result in an imperfect beam.

To my knowledge, James, the half-brother of Jesus, never held a flashlight. However, he would have been familiar with the various lamps of his time. These included the clay pots which held and burned olive oil by means of a wick that protruded through a hole in the end. James may also have been familiar with the Menorah. This was a lamp used during the festival of lights (Hanukkah). Hanukkah commemorated the cleansing of the temple after its defilement by Antiochus IV Epiphanes, and is referenced in John 10:22. Such a lamp would have cast shadows on the floor as the lights were lit one at a time each day of the festival. His familiarity with these kinds of lights would have occasioned him to witness a “shadow that is cast by turning” (Jas. 1:17, ASV).

In contrast to such shadows, James writes, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning” (Jas. 1:17, ASV). In the context, James is rebuking those who would suggest that God tempts men with wickedness (Jas. 1:13-15).

God’s tempting men with wickedness would make God the source of wickedness, which He is not. In contrast, only good things can come from God, because God is Good; He is the Divine Source of virtue to which no other can lay claim (Lk. 18:19). Moreover, God is a good giver, and the gifts He gives are also good. Temptation, however, is a bad giver and gives bad gifts, the gifts of sin and death (Jas. 1:15). Such cannot come from the “Father of lights.”

What do we learn about the “Father of lights” from James 1:17? What we learn may be summarized in three statements: 1) The Father of Lights Gives Good Gifts, 2) The Father of Lights Grounds Good Gifts, and 3) The Father of Lights Guarantees Good Gifts. Looking at these three points will help us to focus upon the text and its spiritual application. Studying through this material, one overarching principle must be kept in mind: God is Good; goodness is essential to Who God is. Each one should contemplate God’s infinite goodness as he goes about the business of being an imitator of God in his character (Eph. 5:1).

#### “THE FATHER OF LIGHTS”

Many commentators construe the expression “Father of lights” to refer to the heavenly bodies. This understanding of the passage, they argue, is rooted in the ancient Hellenistic belief that the heavenly bodies (the stars and planets) were gods. Ferguson attributes these beliefs to Babylonian religion, but also assigns some responsibility to Plato and Aristotle.<sup>2</sup> The influence of such beliefs upon first century Judaism reflected “an openness to astrological symbols in some circles, if only to the extent of affirming the subordination of the stars and the natural order to God and his law.”<sup>3</sup> Stress should be placed upon “some circles” here. It is true that the hosts of heaven are depicted as God’s creation (Neh. 9:6), but the Old Testament strongly condemns astrology (Deut. 4:19; 17:3; 2 Kgs. 17:7; 23:5).

Early Christians showed no religious respect for astrology. Stephen harshly criticizes the ancient Jews for worshipping the host of heaven (Acts 7:42). Jude, also, uses “wandering stars” to refer to false teachers “to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever” (Ju. 13). Paul speaks degradingly concerning “principalities” (*arche*) in Ephesians 3:10; 6:12 and Colossians 1:16; 2:15. In the context of these passages, these “principalities” are hostile to God and Christ.<sup>4</sup> It is against such wicked spiritual beings that Christians wage spiritual warfare (Eph.

6:12). If these “lights” of James 1:17 are associated with Hellenistic astrology, it is wholly incongruous with the genius of the New Testament, which would, at best, make them out to be wicked spirits. The point of James 1:17 is precisely opposite, namely, that God, the Father of Lights, is the author of all goodness, not, *per se*, the Father of wicked spirits. One might make the case that these “lights” were created good, and that may be so. However, James’ intention is not to convey that they went bad after their creation. He clearly means “lights” in a positive sense. It follows that this understanding of James 1:17, as referring to the heavenly bodies/spirits, must be rejected, however academically popular it may be, because it is simply inconsistent with James’ main point: God is not the author of wickedness, He is the “Father of lights” and “lights” are good things.

What meaning, then, can be assigned to the expression “Father of lights”? The answer to this question may be found in the Jewish historical context. Many scholars believe the book to have been written early in the history of Christianity, perhaps in the A.D. 40s, before the conversion of Gentiles. The work addresses a Jewish Christian audience. This is, in part, indicated by the use of the Greek word *sunagoge* and translated “assembly” in James 2:2. Perhaps also James wrote in a cooler season as suggested by the expression “be ye warmed and filled” (Jas. 2:16), and his reference to the time of harvest (Jas. 5:7). All of this suggests that the “lights” of which God is the Father, is related to the festival of dedication, or Hanukkah (Jn. 10:22).

This festival was instituted during the time of Judas Maccabees to commemorate the rededication of the temple after its defilement by Antiochus IV Epiphanes, and was held each year starting on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Kislev (late autumn). Josephus refers to this festival in his *Antiquities*, saying: “... and from that time to this we celebrate this festival, and call it Lights. I suppose the reason was, because this liberty beyond our hopes appeared to us; and that thence was the name given to that festival.”<sup>5</sup> Inasmuch as “lights” is a Jewish metaphor of liberty, Josephus says, this accords with James’ use of that theme (Jas. 1:25; 2:12). It is more consistent with the context of James to suggest that he speaks of the “Father of lights” in this spirit: the light of truth and liberty of which God is the consummate Father. It may well be that James had the festival of Hanukkah specifically in mind. This is not conclusive, but is reasonable, and a better alternative than the tradi-

tional understanding of the “lights” being the heavenly hosts. This study will proceed with this premise in mind.

### THE FATHER OF LIGHTS GIVES GOOD GIFTS

In Greek poetic language (hexameter), James declares: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above” (Jas. 1:17). This is a universal statement. There is not one single gift that is good that does not come from above. Moreover, if it is not from God, then it is not a good gift. The force of the passage in its context is exclusive. All good gifts come from God, and only good gifts come from God. In other words, something is a good gift, if and only if it comes from God. Reflecting upon this principle, James writes in 3:17, “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.” James’ words also echo Jesus’ statement in Matthew 7:17-18—“Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.” Paul employs the same principle, saying: “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Gal. 6:7-8). Regarding men, Jesus says: “A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things” (Mt. 12:35). God is good (Lk. 18:19), so only good fruits can come forth from Him. Hence, all God’s gifts are good, and only good gifts come from God.

Two different Greek words for “gift” are used in James 1:17. The first Greek word is *dosis*. The emphasis of this word is placed on the giving of a gift. The word *dosis* is used primarily for physical things. In the Septuagint, one may find it in Genesis 47:22 referring to food given by Pharaoh to his priests. Proverbs 21:14 speaks of the “gift in secret,” implying something monetary. Paul uses the word *dosis* in Philippians 4:15 to refer to the monetary giving the church at Philippi was doing to support his work. A *dosis* was considered less valuable than a *dorema*, the second word for “gift” in James 1:17.<sup>6</sup> *Dorema* literally means, “what is given,” and so the emphasis is upon the gift, not the giver. The higher value associated with a *dorema* is reflected in Jesus as God’s gift (Rom. 5:16). In using these two words, James’ point

is—whether the gift is great or small, physical or spiritual, whether the focus is upon the giver, or the gift given, God is the source of all, provided that the gift is good.

The adjectives “good” and “perfect” in this verse are predicative: the gift that is good, the gift that is perfect. The Greek word for “good” is *agathos*. It is the typical word used for moral goodness, but is not necessarily limited to morality. The word for “perfect” is *teleios*. It contains the notion of completeness from the standpoint of a thing’s purpose. From these two words we can conclude that God’s gifts are morally pure, and that they fulfill the purpose(s) for which they are being given. These good and perfect gifts, then, reflect upon their Giver, God. God also is morally pure, and fulfills His moral purposes in dispensing His gifts to the world.

As mentioned previously, James’ statement in verse 17 is contrasted with the notion that God tempts man with evil (Jas. 1:13). To the contrary, James argues that God is wholly good and does not tempt with evil. This is primarily seen in His administration of good gifts to the world, both physical and spiritual. God’s physical gifts are provided for all without discrimination according to Matthew 5:45: “... for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” Regarding the physical gifts, a beautiful thought along those lines is found in Acts 14:17, which states: “Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.” The seasons, sunshine, rain, food, and temporal mirth associated therewith, are all blessings God bestows upon His creation. Paul said to the Athenians that God “giveth to all life, and breath, and all things” (Acts 17:25). It is God’s great providence that is responsible for these “good gifts” and for such things we ought to be thankful, “For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving” (1 Tim. 4:4).

God’s spiritual blessings upon man, however, far surpass the physical. The apostle Paul lists some of these blessings in Ephesians 1:3-14. He begins his benediction with the words: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” Among these blessings are: holiness, blamelessness, predestination, sonship, acceptance, redemption, forgiveness of sins, wisdom, knowledge, inheritance, salvation. Truly, we can say with the Psalmist: “Blessed be the Lord,

who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation” (Ps. 68:19).<sup>7</sup> The apostle Peter wrote:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you (1 Pet. 1:3-4).

One would do well to reflect daily upon the great blessings, both physical and spiritual, that God has given. Piermont summed up such blessings when he penned:

For each perfect gift of Thine,  
To our race so freely given,  
Graces human and divine,  
Flowers of earth and buds of Heaven.  
Lord of all, to Thee we raise,  
This our hymn of grateful praise.<sup>8</sup>

Truly the Lord, our God, is good, as saith the Psalmist, “The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works” (Ps. 145:9).

### **THE FATHER OF LIGHTS GROUNDS GOOD GIFTS**

James’ words continue: “... and cometh down from the Father of lights” (Jas. 1:17). The word “father” has within it the concept of source, or origination. These good and perfect gifts from above originate with God because He Himself is both good and perfect. God’s very character is described as good by Jesus in Mark 10:18—“... there is none good but one, that is, God.” Psalm 119:68 declares: “Thou art good, and doest good; teach me thy statutes,” and the apostle John wrote: “And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him” (1 Jn. 4:16). Part of the essence of what it means to be God, therefore, is goodness. Stated another way, God cannot be God and be anything other than good.

This concept of God avoids the classic Platonic dilemma as set forth in the *Euthyphro*—Is that which is good, good because God wills it, or does God will it because it is already good? Suggesting that goodness is simply what God wills, implies that God is arbitrary and capricious. Suggesting that God wills good because it is already good, implies that there is some standard above God. The Bible’s conception of God as the source/origin of goodness passes through the horns of the dilemma by pointing out that there is a third alternative, i.e., God is

intrinsically good. In such a case, goodness is not merely what God wills, because God cannot will something out of harmony with His intrinsic nature. Neither is the good something higher to which God appeals for His goodness, because goodness intrinsic to God's character cannot be above God. In this regard, God is the ultimate ground of that which is good.

God's goodness is often contested by the atheist and skeptic. Their primary argument against God is the existence of evil in the world. They reason that if a good and omnipotent God exists, He would *desire* to eliminate evil completely, and that He would be *powerful* enough to eliminate evil completely. Since He does *not* eliminate evil completely, they conclude, a God that is both good and omnipotent must not exist. They will also cite passages such as Isaiah 45:7 ("I ... create evil") to show that the God of the Bible is actually directly responsible for moral evil.<sup>9</sup> Briefly, one may respond in the following way.

In order for absolute and objective evil to exist in the world, an absolute and objective source of good (God) must exist in order to judge evil to be what it is. For the skeptic and the atheist, the question of the existence of evil in the world is ultimately self-defeating, because it requires that they acknowledge either: 1) the existence of God as the ultimate standard for right and wrong, or 2) that good and evil simply do not ultimately exist, which some contemporary atheists have frankly admitted.<sup>10</sup> All bases for criticizing God depend upon the existence of some absolute and objective evil. To suggest that evil exists in some lesser form implies that it really is no evil at all, and therefore not a source of evidence for incompatibility with God. This ultimately means that if absolute and objective acts of evil exist, then they are wholly compatible with God's existence as an absolutely and objectively good Being. God is not the source of evil, but without God's existence evil could not be possible. God, therefore, becomes the ground of all good things. He must be the ground of all good things.

#### **THE FATHER OF LIGHTS GUARANTEES GOOD GIFTS**

James 1:17 concludes: "... with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Whether, as we discussed earlier, James has in mind the heavenly lights, or earthly lights, their light is limited. Both heavenly and earthly lights cast shadows, which imply their imperfection. Their light can be blocked, impeded, absorbed, and dissolved. The source of their light is also temporal, and subject to entropy; it flickers

and dies. Even the stars, per theory, have an end and go out. No such things can be said for the "Father of lights." Unlike physical light, God's "light" is intrinsic to His being. Unlike everything created, which needs an explanation for itself that is outside of itself, God is the sufficient explanation for Himself; He explains Himself by Himself. Paul states: "[God] only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen" (1 Tim. 6:16). We ought not to think of Paul's assertion, "to whom be honour and power everlasting," as an ascription, but as a statement of being. The words "to whom," which are in Greek simply a single character, *o*, may be construed in the fullest sense of the form including dative, locative, and instrumental notions: to whom, by whom, and in whom is honor and power everlasting. The apostle John reflects this state of being when he writes: "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 Jn. 1:5).

God's light is the light of truth and liberty. Jesus said: "But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God" (Jn. 3:21). He further states: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (Jn. 8:31-32). Truth and liberty have a relationship. Belief and practice of the one result in the other. God's truth penetrates into the deepest recesses of the hearts and minds of men. John wrote that Jesus "was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (Jn. 1:9). Every man then has a choice as to what to do with this light, for he cannot escape it. That light will shine deep within him, and reveal the secrets of his own heart (1 Cor. 14:25). If he is honest with this heavenly beam, he will seek to walk in the light of life (Jn. 8:12). If he loves evil, the light will be abhorrent to him; "For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd" (Jn. 3:20). Regardless, Jesus penetrates into and knows the thoughts of every man's heart (Acts 1:24; Rev. 2:23).

God's light is capable of such things because God, as its source, is immutable, unchanging. In Malachi 3:6, God says: "For I am the Lord, I change not." God's essential nature is such that it cannot be altered. This is another one of God's attributes. For God's nature to change would imply that God is not God. In such a case, He would be no

different than a man, but God is not man that He should change. “God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?” (Num. 23:19). Hebrews 6:17, as well, declares that God’s counsel is immutable. In Romans 11:29, a passage closely parallel to James 1:17, the apostle Paul writes: “For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.” God does not go back on His word; He keeps His promises; He does not lie (Tit. 1:2). Once again, this is because of Who God is, and what it means for God to be God.

Philosophically, this remains unchallenged. Something that changes becomes something other than what it was. Hence, at time “T1,” if we characterize something as essentially “X” (that is, “X” is necessary to its being what it is), and “X” changes, then at time “T2” (after “X” has changed), it must be not “X.” Applying this to the essential nature of God, if such nature were to change, then God would, necessarily, cease to be God. God’s essential nature must remain the same. However, for His essential nature to remain the same, His being/existence must remain the same, for that which is essential to God cannot be essential without an essential and necessary existential ground for such a nature. It follows, then, that God’s existence is also essential to His nature and that God, as was declared to Moses so long ago, is the great I AM. “And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you” (Ex. 3:14).

God, as the ground of ultimate being, is thus also the ground of ultimate truth, and right action, or morality. The Ground of all things that exist cannot entail contradiction to those things, neither can the Ground of all things oppose the purpose of all things. In seeking to fulfill the ultimate purpose of a thing, which thing is grounded in God (ultimately) it may be said that one does good. It follows that God is ultimately good, and that His essential nature of goodness cannot be altered. He who is the Father of Lights, cannot vary, and does not cast shadows. He penetrates through all existing things by virtue of His being their ultimate ground of being. His light knows no barrier. It cannot be blocked, impeded, absorbed, or dissolved. It is not temporal, not subject to entropy, and never flickers, or dies. Those who seek to impede it are consumed by it (Num. 16:26). Only those who walk in it may dwell with it. Such is the nature of God’s being and the “light” that proceeds forth from Him.

### CONCLUSION

In the proceedings of the U.S. Naval institute is a story of two battleship training squadrons conducting maneuvers off the California coast. Becoming lost in a fog, the lookout reported a light on the starboard bow. The Captain inquired as to whether it was steady or moving. "Steady" came the reply, which meant the squadron was on a collision course. The captain of the squadron ordered the signalman, "Signal that ship that we are on a collision course and have them change course twenty degrees." The signal came back, "You change course twenty degrees." The captain ordered the reply, "I am the senior captain, change your course twenty degrees." The reply was: "I am a seaman second class. Change your course twenty degrees." The captain became angry and signaled, "We are a battleship squadron! Change your course immediately!" The return signal was simply: "I am a lighthouse." The squadron changed course.

While amusing, this story illustrates a great truth. The "Father of lights" does not change course. He is the one who is steady and true, and to His will, all must conform. When He replies, "Change course," man must alter his direction lest He be cast upon the rocks, and be lost. His message is good because He is good, and so seeks to fulfill our highest purposes. The gifts He bestows steer to the safe course, and ultimately bring one to a safe harbor. His light cannot wrongly guide, if heeded. May each one so live as to heed the course proceeding from that Great Light.

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are taken from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 239.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>4</sup> Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans., Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 1:483.

<sup>5</sup> Flavius Josephus, *The Works of Josephus*, trans., William Whiston (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), bk. 12, chap.7, sec. 7:328.

<sup>6</sup> Kittel, 2:166.

<sup>7</sup> The ASV reads, "Blessed be the Lord, who daily beareth our burden, Even the God who is our salvation."

<sup>8</sup> Folliet Piermont, *For the Beauty of the Earth* (1864).

<sup>9</sup> For a complete discussion of this issue, see “Is God the Source of Evil” in the *2010 Schertz Lectures The Book of Isaiah*.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Dawkins, *River Out of Eden* (New York: Basic Books. 1995), 133.

# “YE ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD”

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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Light is an interesting concept to consider from a Biblical standpoint. The word “light” is found well over two hundred times in the Bible. The first time we read about light is in the first chapter of the first book. In Genesis 1:3, we read those words that are so familiar to us: “Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light.” It is further revealed that God “saw the light, that it was good” (v. 4). Is it any wonder then that the Creator of light is Himself Light? In fact, there is no darkness at all in God (1 Jn. 1:5).

There is another important “Light” that was with God in the beginning. This Light existed with God in eternity before the foundation of the world was ever laid. That Light is the Second Person of the Godhead—Jesus Christ. A study of John 1 provides us with much detail regarding Christ as Light. As the “true Light,” Christ provides light for mankind (Jn. 1:9). Jesus confessed: “I am the light of the world” (Jn. 8:12; 9:5). Those who follow Jesus, those who completely and wholly follow His will, will be safe from darkness and will have the “light of life.”

If our God is *light*, His only begotten Son is *light*, and Christians are to be godly and Christ-like in every way, then we must understand our responsibility as bearers of that *Light*. Sadly, many Christians fail to fulfill their duty as God’s light bearers. There are those who “tentatively” obey but want to keep one foot in the way of darkness. Perhaps, as Christians we fail to keep in our minds that there is no

darkness at all in God or His Son Jesus—there never has been and there never will be. Thus, as those who are to be imitators of Christ, we must understand that there is no place for darkness (sin) in our lives. As those who wear the name of Christ, we are commanded to be the lights of this world.

### A CONSIDERATION OF THE TEXT

The Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5, begins with the “Beatitudes” of great blessings in the kingdom of God. Each beatitude provides the disciples of Jesus with great wisdom which is essential for spiritual growth and living. Jesus even tells them of the joy that awaits those who overcome persecution. H. Leo Boles noted: “The citizens of this heavenly kingdom that Jesus preached was at hand are to become ‘the salt of the earth.’ The citizens of this kingdom are described by the beatitudes, and they are to have saving influence in the world.”<sup>2</sup> The disciples, as the salt, were absolutely necessary for the preservation of mankind. In fact, the disciples of Jesus are so important that they would serve as lights to the world. Notice, Jesus said:

You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven (Mt. 5:14-16).

Certainly such a passage is worth our meditation. In thinking of Jesus being the “light of the world,” and His command for His followers to be lights of the world, one sees that it is a tremendous responsibility to fulfill.

Christ’s influence as a light was far reaching. It is seen in the willingness of the apostles to leave everything behind to follow after Jesus (Mt. 4:18-22). It is seen in His healing power, His compassion for people, and His recognition of a plentiful harvest (Mt. 9:35-38). The light that radiated from Christ caused great multitudes to follow Him (Mt. 14:13-21). His light shined bright when He hung on the cross for the benefit of all those who would come to Him. Perhaps it is these things we need to think about when we consider the type of light we are to be in this world.

Think about light in physical terms or in terms of what light does. It is active, for it travels 186,000 miles per second. It does not take one very long to observe that light enables us to see. It is something that is

essential to the continuance of life. Light does its work quietly. It awakens, whether it is the rising of the morning sun, or the flip of a light switch.

Comparing Christ, the spiritual Light, with physical light, think about the applications that can be made relative to the child of God being a light to the world. First, we must leave all and follow Christ (Lk. 9:23-26). In so doing, our example should affect others in a way that they would want to leave the darkness of the world and follow Christ, too (cf. 1 Pet. 3:1-2, 15-17).

Second, as lights to the world those in Christ have been entrusted with the Gospel, which has the power to heal man of his sins. Paul was a worthy light-bearer because he believed in the healing power of the Gospel of Christ. It was Paul who boldly proclaimed that the Gospel is the "power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16, KJV). A good light-bearer proclaims the "truth" with compassion, i.e., "in love" (Eph. 4:15; cf. Phil. 1:14, 17). Those who preach the Gospel from "selfish ambition, not sincerely" (Phil. 1:15-16), do not let their light shine in a way that glorifies God. Those who realize the power of the Gospel and have a deep love for it will see the plentiful harvest that is to be had.

Third, if light radiates from our being, those in darkness will follow Christ. Yes, there will be those who reject us, just as Christ was rejected (cf. 2 Tim. 3:12). However, we must understand that if we will plant the seed (cf. Lk. 8:11), and if we will water, God will give the increase (1 Cor. 3:6-7).

Fourth, our light must shine bright no matter what comes our way. The church at Smyrna was suffering greatly, but its light was shining bright (Rev. 2:8-11). Paul suffered with a "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7-10), along with a long list of persecutions (2 Cor. 11:22-33; cf. Acts 14:19-20), but his light was still burning bright. Indeed, those whose lights shine to the end have a glorious home awaiting them (Mt. 5:10-12; 2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 2:10).

Fifth, in our analogy to physical light, to be the light he should be the Christian is to be active. The church at Laodicea was condemned for their inactivity (Rev. 3:14-22). Matthew 5:16 reads: "Let your light so shine." That implies being active. The contrast, in verse 15, is inactivity—putting it under a bushel. The Christian light is to actively shine, rather than be hidden.

Sixth, your Christian light may be the only light others will see. The purpose of light is to help people see and find their way. If those in this world have no one to shine light on them, they will remain in darkness and be lost for all eternity.

Seventh, our light is essential to the continuance of life. Light is necessary for plants to survive and go through the process of photosynthesis. The light of Christians is essential if those outside of Christ are to have life. Christians provide the light (Truth, Gospel) that will enable the ones outside of Christ to learn what they need to do to be in Christ and survive for eternity with the Light.

Eighth, the Christian light works quietly. Light, more times than not, works without drawing attention to itself. When light does draw attention, it is usually because of something else, such as a fancy chandelier. When Christians go about doing good, what we might say “working quietly,” they will at times draw attention to themselves, but the intention is that others see Christ in us.

Last, the Christian light should awaken. For the morning person, there is nothing like the sun’s rising and awakening them from their sleep. The Christian light has the ability to awaken those who are spiritually asleep (or dead). These nine things can help us understand what Christ meant when He said: “You are the light of the world” (Mt. 5:14).

The light of Christ will never be put out! As a Christian, then, it is my responsibility to “glorify” God. Every good work done in the name of Christ Jesus is to be done to praise, magnify, celebrate and bring honor to Christ (cf. Col. 3:17). J.W. McGarvey wrote:

As light dispels darkness from the world, and enables men to see how to journey and labor, so the disciples, by their good works, their teaching, and their example, dispel ignorance and prejudice, and enable men to see the way of eternal life. In this way they are the light of the world ... We are to studiously pursue such a line of conduct in the presence of the world as will induce them to glorify God.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps our being lights speaks to the need to be prepared as a child of God, ready to give an answer, ready to speak of the truth that is in us, and thus put to shame those who are not receptive to God’s Word and who fail to glorify Him (1 Pet. 3:15-17). So, while we may not always be well received, our ultimate goal in all things, as the shining lights Christ will have us to be, is to bring glory to God.

### **CHRISTIANS ARE IMPORTANT TO THE WORLD**

Every man and woman who has obeyed the Gospel of Christ, regardless of their age or their physical abilities is important to the Lord's church and this world! How sad it is when Christians allow Satan to cause them to believe they cannot make a difference, or that they are an insignificant part of the body! The "Parable of the Talents," in Matthew 25, reminds us of our responsibility to use the individual talents God has given us. It is in that same chapter that we find the "goats on the left" who had failed in their responsibility to help others. Those individuals on the left were told: "Depart ... into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Mt. 25:41). There are consequences for those who fail to realize their importance to the church and the world.

The apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 12:4-27, makes some important observations about the body. Within the Lord's church there are many members with many talents or abilities. As Paul clearly points out, there are no unimportant parts in the body! We are all (as God's children) special in His sight. It does not matter what part we might play. God has set each member in the body "just as He pleased" (v. 18). The body does not function properly when someone is not fulfilling his responsibility. Our physical bodies contain many parts, and it is not until one of those parts is injured that we realize how important it is to our everyday lives. It is the same with the church. Often, we may not realize how much someone has done until after he moves away, or has passed on from this life. Our mentality ought to be to do as much as we can for the Lord with what God has given us, no matter where we are in life. The young Christian is important to the church because of their energy and zeal, and they can have a great influence on their peers living in the world. Golden-aged Christians are important for their wisdom and knowledge that needs to be shared with the younger generations. Likewise, they are important to the world because they are great examples and often well-respected. The middle-aged Christian is important to the church because they often are in positions of leadership and teach Bible classes. They are important to the world, because they represent the working class and serve as lights to those in the workforce, as well as lights in their children's lives and those in their children's schools. Members of the church working together where their congregation is located serve as a tremendously important spiritual

light to their community. Moreover, they are important because, working together, they have the responsibility of reaching out with the Gospel to those areas in this world where the “body of Christ” has not been established.

There is a wonderful song we sing, entitled “Let the Lower Lights be Burning.” It helps to remind us of the importance of our light.

Brightly beams our Father’s mercy  
 From His lighthouse evermore,  
 But to us He gives the keeping  
 Of the lights along the shore.  
 Dark the night of sin has settled,  
 Loud the angry billows roar;  
 Eager eyes are watching, longing,  
 For the lights, along the shore.  
 Trim your feeble lamp, my brother,  
 Some poor sailor tempest tossed,  
 Trying now to make the harbor,  
 In the darkness may be lost.

Chorus:

Let the lower lights be burning!  
 Send a gleam across the wave!  
 Some poor fainting, struggling seaman  
 You may rescue, you may save.<sup>4</sup>

Bliss penned those words after hearing someone describe the lighthouses of former times. The lighthouses guided the ships of the night in the right direction, and the lower lights along the shore helped to steer them to safety. Imagine being a ship tossed to and fro out on the open sea in a storm at night, perhaps thrown off course and lost. There would be nothing more comforting for the captain and his crew than to see the lower lights that would guide them to safety. Or, what about the sea captain guiding his ship in the dark of night and the lower lights have gone out? He tries to make it into the harbor without the guidance of those lights, but misses and crashes upon the rocks, sending him and his crew to a watery grave. The lighthouse represents the Lord and His message.

The eunuch had the very light of God’s Word in his hand, and at the time Philip approached him, he was found to be reading from the prophet Isaiah. Philip asked the eunuch: “Do you understand what you are reading?” (Acts 8:30). The eunuch responded: “How can I, unless

someone guides me?” (v. 31). Philip was one of the “lower lights” that guided the eunuch to Jesus. Finding his way to Christ, through Philip, the eunuch obeyed the Gospel. Why, then, are Christians important to the world? They are the lights that guide lost souls to Christ. If the lower lights go out, who will guide the lost to Christ? We cannot think that the lost will make it to Jesus on their own. Yes, they may see the light of Jesus, but may crash and sink before they make it safely into His care. Just like a ship needs the lower lights to guide it safely into the harbor, the world needs Christians to lead them to Christ (cf. Rom. 10:14-17).

### **BEING THE “LIGHT OF THE WORLD” IS MORE THAN “INFLUENCE”**

Influence is something that every human being has whether they will admit it or not. Webster defines it as, “the act or power of producing an effect without apparent exertion of force or direct exercise of command.”<sup>5</sup> It does not matter if you are rich or poor, young or old, weak or strong, you possess some kind of influence on others. Some influence is good, some bad. Influence is something that can be changed from bad to good or from good to bad. Think about how you can influence others as a “light” in this world.

First, we have an influence on others by the things we say. James writes that with our tongue, “we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men ... Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing” (Jas. 3:9-10). What is it that those of the world hear coming from your mouth? Is it those things that would have a positive influence or a negative influence upon them?

Second, what about the things we do? The apostle Paul wrote: “Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Phil. 1:27). We cannot act like a Christian on Sunday and live like the world the rest of the week. If we live our lives in such a way, we are hypocrites and have a damaging influence on those around us. Paul wanted brethren to make sure they were consistent in their faith at all times and not just when he was present.

Third, we can have an influence on others in the way we love. John records for us these words of Jesus—“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love

one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn. 13:34-35). The love of Christ was far reaching; it was a giving, sacrificial love. His love extended to all of mankind and was/is not partial. There are so many other ways we can influence others: by our faith, our godly living, our spirit towards others, etc.

It is interesting that while we see the influence of others throughout the Bible, the word “influence” is never mentioned in the New Testament. It would seem, then, that being the “light of the world” entails more than mere influence. There are many great examples in the Scripture to show such is true. Josiah, king of Judah is described as one who “did what was right in the sight of the Lord” (2 Kgs. 22:2). When Hilkiah brought the “Book of the Law” before the king and Shaphan read the words, Josiah tore his clothes. What Josiah learned was that Judah had not been in obedience to God’s law and that changes needed to be made. As one who did right in God’s eyes, his influence was far reaching. Josiah’s influence was marked by action and example. He could have used influential and persuasive words to persuade the people to turn back to God, but it was his determination to remove the idols from the land and demand for the worship of Jehovah to be restored that showed his true ability to change a nation for the better. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah spoke great messages to the remnant of Judah that had returned from Babylonian captivity. In fact, they were instrumental in influencing the people to resume rebuilding and completing the temple. As with Josiah, their influence went beyond words, it was seen in action. In Ezra 5:1-2 we see these two prophets of God, working and helping the people rebuild; in fact, they helped until it was finished (Ezra 6:14). Nehemiah was much the same way when he encouraged the people to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. His influence, example, and stand against opposing forces led the people to complete the rebuilding process in fifty-two days (Neh. 6:15). The example of these men goes well beyond their influence. They were true lights that led and turned people back to God. They went well beyond Webster’s definition of influence mentioned earlier.

In the New Testament, the seven churches of Asia represent that our influence is something more. The seven churches of Asia are represented by lampstands.

Note that a lampstand is not the light itself, but that which bears or carries the light. Spiritual light comes from God, but the

churches are responsible for holding it forth (cf. Jn. 1:7-9; Phil. 2:15-16). If we allow the light to be extinguished, our lampstand will be removed.<sup>6</sup>

Each church addressed in Revelation 2-3 was composed of the Lord’s people. Their “light” represented more than mere influence, for the Lord threatened to remove the lampstand from those congregations that needed to repent (Rev. 2:5). Five churches were rebuked for the actions in which they were involved. Think how quickly such actions could destroy the church in a place. On the other hand, two churches had actions that were good. They were exhorted to continue on in the faith. The church at Smyrna was encouraged to keep working even in the face of persecution, and the church at Philadelphia was encouraged to “Hold fast what you have” (Rev. 3:11). The church shines forth the light of God. It must burn bright every day. Our influence and actions are on display, whether we want them to be or not. To be the light God wants us to be it must shine forth in every aspect of our life.

Think about the following in relation to our light being more than influence.

Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain. Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all (Phil. 2:14-17).

Grumbling, complaining, and disputing do not bring others to the light. They destroy our influence. The word for “grumbling” is the same word used to describe Israel’s complaining in the wilderness in 1 Corinthians 10:10. In part, Israel’s complaining caused a whole generation to miss out on entering the Promised Land. Light bearers of Jesus are to be blameless, harmless, and those who hold true to His word. These build influence based upon actions. Our positive, active Christian living is needed for the “crooked and perverse generation” we live in, especially if we expect to fully win someone over to Christ.

**“LIGHT” AND “GOOD WORKS”  
ARE THINGS THAT GLORIFY GOD**

“And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Col. 3:17).

The Christian life is one that should bring glory to God's name. No one better exemplified the kind of works that are to glorify God than Christ. Consider the following:

Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work" (Jn. 4:34).

But I have a greater witness than John's; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish—the very works that I do—bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me (Jn. 5:36).

I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work (Jn. 9:4).

Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me" (Jn. 10:25).

I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was (Jn. 17:4-5).

The "Light of the world" lived to fulfill His Father's will, doing the good works His Father sent Him to do. Jesus helped those in need—He was benevolent. He healed the lame, maimed, blind, and paralyzed. He came to heal those who were spiritually sick (Lk. 19:10). He provided multitudes with both physical and spiritual food (Jn. 6:1-14, 22-40). He encouraged others. He visited the houses of sinners and tax collectors (Lk. 19:2ff; Mt. 9:10-11). He encouraged an adulterous woman to "go and sin no more" (Jn. 8:11). Last and most importantly, Jesus taught His Father's will. He preached sermons, taught in houses, taught in parables, and confirmed the Word through miracles. All these things brought glory to His Father, because He carried out His Father's will.

Individually speaking, our mission as the "light to the world" is aptly stated in Ephesians 2:10—"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." What is the purpose of the Christian life? Is it not, according to this verse, "good works"? It is worthy to point out that "no matter how many good works we accomplish, if we are not 'in Christ,' they will be for nothing, so far as our salvation is concerned."<sup>7</sup> Jesus alludes to this very point in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 7:21-23). Not everyone who says to Him, "Lord, Lord," will be allowed entry into the kingdom of heaven, even though they may claim to have done good works in God's name. Only those who do the will of the

Father in heaven will be rewarded for their “good works.” Clearly, it is the complete obedience to God’s Word with a proper attitude (Mt. 5:16; 23:5) that brings glory to His name. Paul, throughout his Christian life, sought to do those things that would bring glory to God (Gal. 1:10) and His church (2 Cor. 11:28). He did not want to do anything that would disqualify (1 Cor. 9:27) him from the crown of life.

The “good works” we are to be involved in are the same as our Lord’s—benevolence, edification, and evangelism. To let our light truly shine we must have a benevolent spirit. In Matthew 25, we learn that those who helped the hungry, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the prisoners were rewarded because they had, in effect, done these things to the Lord. On the other hand, those who failed to help, failed to bring glory to God and were cast away. Another example of benevolence is found in the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37). Two men (a priest and a Levite) who should have helped the poor soul—one who had been beaten, robbed and left him for dead—passed by on the other side. On the other hand, it was the Good Samaritan who risked his safety and made the sacrifice to help the man. He provided the man with what he needed to get well. Speaking about the benevolence of the Samaritan, Jesus said: “Go and do likewise.” James, in writing about a living and active faith, addressed benevolence. He wrote: “If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?” (Jas. 2:15-16). If a Christian harbors such an attitude, his faith is dead; thus, his light is not shining. We let our light shine and glorify God with an active benevolent spirit. “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Gal 6:10).

The second “good work” by which we must let our lights shine is edification. The following speak volumes regarding our responsibility to glorify God through edification. Inspiration instructs:

Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another (Rom 14:19).

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the

knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:11-13).

... from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love (Eph. 4:16).

Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing (1 Thess. 5:11).

How sad it is when Christians tear each other down, instead of building each other up! How could anyone ever think that having a negative attitude, and nit-picking every little thing that fellow Christians do, is letting one's light shine in a way that brings glory to God's name? Paul sent Timothy to Thessalonica for the express purpose of establishing the brethren and encouraging them in the faith (1 Thess. 3:2). Barnabas encouraged the brethren at Antioch to "continue with the Lord" (Acts 11:23). The light of edification affects people in ways we may never know, but God who is glorified knows.

The third work by which our lights must glorify God in is through evangelism. There is no greater joy than sharing the light of God's Word with others. Jesus commissioned His disciples to, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk 16:15). Certainly, that commission applies to His people today as there are still lost souls in need of hearing the Gospel. Heaven rejoices when lost souls respond (Lk. 15). Peter, John, Paul, Philip, Barnabas, Timothy, and the list could go on of men who glorified God in doing their part to evangelize the world. When we read about such men in the Scripture, we can see the light that shined in their lives. What joy there is in teaching a lost soul the Gospel and seeing that precious soul respond! We teach others because we love God, we love His Word, and we love what He has done for us, and want others to share in the blessings God bestows upon the faithful.

### **HOW CHRISTIANS ARE PUTTING THEIR LIGHT "UNDER A BUSHEL"**

One of the great Sunday school songs we teach our children is, "This Little Light of Mine." The message is simple: "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine, all the time, all the time." "Never let the devil, 'pfff' it out, I'm gonna let it shine." "Hide it under a bushel, NO, I'm gonna let it shine." Perhaps, this is not a song to be sung only by

children in Bible classes, but a song we adults should also be singing in our worship services. How many Christians would sing this song in vain, if it were sang regularly during our worship services? Our light is to shine at all times—and God forbid we ever let Satan “pfff” out our light! Sadly, many Christians are hiding their light under a bushel.

The church at Sardis is a prime example of a group that hid their light (Rev. 3:1-6). The text indicates that the church was once a shining light in the community. Apparently, they had done some great things to the glory of God and had made a name for themselves. They once were alive, but now they were dead. Likely they did not die overnight, but slowly one-by-one the lights began to be hidden or put out by the “bushel.” The Lord encourages them to strengthen the things that remain before they die. Then, the Lord admonishes them to “remember”—remember what they had previously done and start doing it once again. It was time to throw away the bushels and let their lights shine again before it was eternally too late.

How many congregations of the Lord’s people are in that same condition today? Churches that were once great lights in the community, but in recent times have seen their lights dimmed or become hidden. Such a congregation may have members who reached the age and covered their light thinking it was time for the next generation to do the work. It may have members of the working class who are afraid to let their lights shine for fear of being accused of being “politically incorrect,” or are fearful of losing their jobs for sharing the Gospel with their co-workers. Too, it may have members who fail to let their lights shine because their children are involved in every imaginable school activity; therefore, they do not have time to talk to others about the Gospel or be involved in the work of the church outside of Sundays (and maybe Wednesday nights).

Christians are putting their lights “under a bushel” in ways other than inactivity and idleness. Many have hidden their lights when it comes to standing for God’s Word. Instead, of standing on the truth as a bright shining light, they cover their light and go with the flow. It seems the churches at Pergamos and Thyatira were guilty of this. The church at Pergamos (Rev. 2:12-17) had held fast to Christ’s name and had not denied the faith, but they were not what they should be morally speaking. The church at Thyatira (Rev. 2:18-23) seemed to have “works, love, service, faith,” but they had moral issues as well. How many Christians are no longer letting their light shine because of such

issues as marriage, divorce, and remarriage, homosexuality, fornication, drinking, dancing, immodesty, *et cetera*? The apostle Paul wrote: “Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Eph. 6:13). As light-bearers of God’s Word, we must fight to the end and uphold the truth in all things. We have no business putting our light “under a bushel” when the Word of God is compromised. Those who do so share in the evil deeds and will be held accountable (2 Jn. 11; Rom. 1:32).

### CONCLUSION

It is time for members of the Lord’s church in many places to reclaim their place as the “light of the world.” It is time for them to take the “bushel” off of their lights so they can be seen shining once again. No one can put out our light as long as we remain faithful to God. It ultimately cost him his physical life, but Stephen boldly let his light shine in Acts 7. His light is still shining today through the Scriptures account of his faithfulness! Let your light so shine that others may see Christ in you! When others can see Christ living in us, we are letting our light shine. As a result, we can expect good things to happen which glorify God. Then, we can take comfort in knowing what lies ahead in our heavenly home.

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are taken from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> H. Leo Boles, *A Commentary On The Gospel According To Matthew* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, 1989), 127.

<sup>3</sup> J.W. McGarvey, *The New Testament Commentary, Matthew and Mark* (Delight, AR: Gospel Light, 1875), 1:51-52.

<sup>4</sup> Phillip P. Bliss, *Let the Lower Lights be Burning* (1871).

<sup>5</sup> *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* (1995), s.v. “influence.”

<sup>6</sup> Donald R. Taylor, *The Apocalypse: A Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Memphis, TN: Write Way, 1996), 38.

<sup>7</sup> Max Patterson, *An Outline Commentary On The Book of Ephesians* (Neosho, MO: published by author, n.d.), 14.

# “MADE MANIFEST BY THE LIGHT”

*Douglas Hoff*



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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

The assigned text for this study is Ephesians 5:13, which states: “But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light.” Just two verses earlier Paul had written that the Ephesian Christians were to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them” (Eph. 5:11). Therefore, there is a natural connection between these two verses since verse eleven shows *what* Christians are to do and verse thirteen indicates *how* it is done.

This study will first consider the connection between Ephesians 5:11 and Ephesians 5:13, paying particular attention to the meaning of the word which is translated “expose” and “exposed” in the New King James Version of these verses. Second, an examination of the immediate and remote context of the passage will show what is made manifest that needs reproving. Third, the passage will be scrutinized to clearly identify what the light is that reveals the deeds of darkness. Fourth, there will be a discussion of how the light reveals these things and can correct spiritual errors and imperfections.

## SOME RELEVANT BACKGROUND ON THE CHURCH IN EPHESUS

The composition of the Ephesian church appears to have been primarily Gentile, though some Jews were most likely members as well. Paul preached the Gospel in the synagogue in that city but encountered opposition which led him to take the disciples to the school of Tyrannus (Acts 18:19; 19:1, 8-9). Over a two year period

Paul continued preaching “so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:10). Obviously then, the Jews in Ephesus had heard the Gospel. That some became Christians seems probable for at least two reasons. First, Paul speaks at length in Ephesians about the fact that both Jew and Gentile now have access to God in one body, which is the church of Christ (Eph. 2:11-18; cf. 1:22-23). If the Ephesian congregation was composed solely of Gentile converts it seems unlikely that such a discussion would be necessary. Second, Paul wanted Timothy to remain in Ephesus to “charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies” (1 Tim. 1:3-4). Jewish converts would be the ones interested in such matters because of their racial pride. Paul also speaks about some unnamed ones who desired to be teachers of the law (1 Tim. 1:7). Again, this points to Jews rather than Gentiles. However, that the Gentile converts seem to be the majority of the church is seen in the pointed remarks Paul made to and about them. For example, in Ephesians 2:11, it is written: “Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands.” Later in the letter the apostle spoke of himself as “Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles” (Eph. 3:1). In his last reference to Gentiles in the letter, referring to their troubled past which they needed to overcome, Paul points out: “This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind” (Eph. 4:17). Paul described himself as the apostle to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:13; Gal. 2:7-8). As such, it is not surprising that he worked among primarily Gentile churches. The book of Acts reveals that Paul’s custom was to preach the Gospel to the Jews first and later to the Gentiles (Acts 17:1-2). He showed no partiality knowing that the Gospel “is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” (Rom. 1:16). Even though he taught the Jews the Word of the Lord, he generally seemed to have more success among the Gentiles. It is noteworthy that while the word “Gentiles” is mentioned five times in Ephesians, the words “Jew” and “Jews” are absent. The words “Israelite” and “Israelites” are also missing from Ephesians. Only once does the apostle refer to Israel, and that is in pointing out that, before the Gospel, the Gentiles had been “without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without

God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). Thus, it is reasonable to believe that the church in Ephesus in Paul's day was made up predominantly of non-Jewish converts (Eph. 3:8). Sadly, many of those Gentiles had led very sinful lives before their conversion to Jesus Christ. This is why Paul had to address the sins of their former lives.

### **UNFRUITFUL WORKS OF DARKNESS MUST BE EXPOSED AND REPROVED**

Whether they came from a Jewish or Gentile background, Paul wanted the Ephesians (and all Christians) to walk worthy of their new found life in the Lord (Eph. 4:1). Both, Jew and Gentile, had become new creatures in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Paul said that in obeying the Gospel the old man had been crucified with Christ that "body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin" (Rom. 6:6; cf. 6:17-18). Once a person is baptized into Christ, he should walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4). In the letter of Colossians, Paul tells Christians: "Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him" (Col. 3:9-10). In contrast, to the Ephesians he wrote, "... that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:22-24). Is there a contradiction between these passages? No. In one sense, the old man is dead, but there is an ongoing struggle to put to death the deeds of the body (Rom. 8:13; Col. 3:5). The process of becoming conformed to the image of God's Son takes time (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18). The Scriptures speak of it in terms of growing (e.g., 1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18). Consequently, Paul could speak to the Ephesians as new creatures in Christ who still needed to fight against the unfruitful works of darkness. This is also true for Christians today, whether they have been in the body for one day or seventy years.

The word "walk" is often employed in the Bible as a metaphor for one's manner of life. In Ephesians, it occurs seven times in six verses. To walk worthily of the Lord, the Christians in Ephesus needed to submit their lives to the will of the Lord Jesus the Christ (cf. Acts 21:14). The Ephesians were told: "Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:17). Paul wrote very

similar words to the brethren in the city of Colosse, saying: "... walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:10). Coming out of a worldly background the Gentile converts needed to learn how to live a new life-style that was in harmony with their new relationship with God. Concerning the radical transformation the Ephesians had experienced and the consequent responsibility that attended it, the apostle reminded them: "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light" (Eph. 5:8). Notice that Paul did not say that they had "walked in darkness" but that *they had been darkness*. Their lives were utterly corrupt. Now that they were children of light, they were to walk in the light (1 Jn. 1:7). Jesus said: "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (Jn. 8:12).

By living new lives as children of light they would prove what is acceptable to the Lord (Eph. 5:10; cf. Rom. 12:2). Ephesians 5:11 reveals a two-fold duty that every Christian has, but was especially appropriate for the Gentiles. They were to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them" (Eph. 5:11). As children of light they would have nothing in common with darkness and its works. A child of God realizes the need to turn away from the sins of his former life, but it takes a lot of conviction and courage to expose and reprove sinful deeds. Yet, this is part of the Christian's walk with the Lord. To be faithful to the Lord the disciple must not only avoid sinful behavior, he must also show it for what it really is. This means shining the light of God's Word upon the darkness to make it manifest. This is the connection between Ephesians 5, verses 11 and 13. However, there is an issue common to both verses that needs to be addressed.

#### **SHOULD EPHESIANS 5:11 AND 13 READ EXPOSE(D) OR REPROVE(D)?**

While the New King James Version is a fairly accurate translation of God's Word, there are some instances where certain words could have been translated better. This section of Scripture is one such case. Instead of using the word "expose" the King James Version and the American Standard Version (1901) employ "reprove" or "reproved." This is a more accurate rendering of the original Greek word which is transliterated *elengkho*. According to any standard lexicon this Greek

word means to *convict, convince, rebuke* or *reprove*.<sup>2</sup> The English dictionary definition for "reprove" is: "to criticize or correct, especially gently: to reprove a pupil for making a mistake."<sup>3</sup> Alternately, it also carries the idea of "to disapprove of strongly; censure: to reprove a bad decision." On the contrary, the word "expose" has many shades of meaning including: "1.) to present to view; exhibit; display; 2.) to make known, disclose, or reveal (intentions, secrets, etc.); 3.) to reveal or unmask (a crime, fraud, impostor, etc.) and 4.) to hold up to public reprehension or ridicule (fault, folly, a foolish act or person, etc.)." The last definition listed for "expose" comes the closest to the idea conveyed in the original Greek word used in Ephesians 5:11,13. In this writer's estimation, although the word "expose" has one meaning similar to the idea expressed by *elengkho*, it is only one among many others that do not have the thought of reproof. Because it expresses the concept of pointing out error with disapproval, and the desire for correction, the word "reprove" is the better choice for Ephesians 5:11 and 13.

### **REPROVING REQUIRES USING THE LIGHT OF GOD'S WORD**

While it is true that light will expose many faults and defects, that is only part of the job that must be undertaken. For example, in a dark room many imperfections in a wall's surface and paint job may not be seen. But, let the sunshine hit the wall and the minutest flaws can easily be seen. Sometimes, it takes a lot of work to correct the surface defects through the use of joint compound, sanding and priming before the final coat of paint makes the wall look good. So it is with sin in the lives of Christians. The light of God's Word will reveal iniquity in one's life (Ps. 119:105, 133). God's Word points out the transgression by showing it to be a violation of the highest law there is. As such, the Gospel reproves. Paul explains:

[T]he law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust (1 Tim. 1:9-11).

Proclaiming the Gospel points out what the will of God is and it shows sinners that they need to repent of their sins. As the writer of Hebrews stated: “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12).

Since sin is the transgression of the law (1 Jn. 3:4, KJV), and since without law there would be no transgression (Rom. 4:15), it is obvious that souls need to be made aware of the law by which they will be judged one day (Jn. 12:48). If they are ignorant of God’s law, they may believe they are in no danger of eternal punishment, for they may not believe in God in the first place. However, even if they acknowledge the existence of the God of heaven, being ignorant of His law could leave them with a false sense of security since they are unaware of God’s judgment against unforgiven sin. The Bible emphatically declares: “[A]ll have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Thus, there is a universal sin problem among mankind. But, what is the penalty for violating divine law? Paul informs his readers: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). Clearly then, man truly needs to hear the Gospel, for it is the good news that though souls have sinned against their God, He is willing to forgive them and give them the gift of eternal life. The Gospel is the power of God to save lost souls from their justly deserved penalty (Rom. 1:16). The Gospel declares the love of God, but it also warns man of the judgment to come and the need to prepare for that day (Rom. 2:16).

Man needs to know that he has sinned, but what will convince him of his true spiritual condition? Before turning to Christ, the Ephesians were dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). They needed to hear the Gospel to appreciate that they were accountable to the Creator of this universe. The Gospel message was confirmed to be from God by the miracles which Paul performed (cf. Mk. 16:20; Heb. 2:3-4). Not only did he reason with the Jews and Greeks using the Scriptures (Acts 18:19; cf. 17:2, 17; 18:4), he also worked signs among them as proof that his message was truly from God (Acts 19:6, 11-18). This got their attention and made them inclined to hear the message Paul brought. As the beloved physician and historian Luke recorded:

This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord

Jesus was magnified. And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed (Acts 19:17-20).

Once they had heard the verified message, many of the Ephesians were convinced of their need for salvation and obeyed the Gospel. They exhibited repentance even though it may have involved a great economic loss. The committed follower of Christ will make any sacrifice necessary to gain Christ knowing this results in true riches indeed (Phil. 3:8-11; cf. Lk. 16:11).

Today, many people see no need for salvation since they do not think they are lost. Many declare themselves to be good people who believe in God, but their knowledge of Him is limited. As it was in the first century, it is the case today that the confirmed Gospel needs to be preached to those who are lost in sin and unaware of their sinfulness. However, unlike the first century, Christians of today cannot perform miracles, but there is no need for them to do so. The Bible was verified through signs, wonders and miracles—it does not need modern-day reconfirmation. Paul noted the temporary nature of the miraculous spiritual gifts Christ gave to the church (Eph. 4:7-13; 1 Cor. 13:8-13). When the written revelation of the New Testament was completed near the end of the first century, there was no more need for the spiritual gifts spoken of in 1 Corinthians 12-14. Jude 3 says: "[T]he faith [i.e., the Gospel] ... was once for all delivered to the saints." The literal meaning here is that the one faith/Gospel has been delivered from God one time for all men of all time, and it will not be altered. To see that the faith is equivalent to the Gospel all one needs to do is compare Galatians 1:11 with Galatians 1:23. Paul said that he preached the Gospel (v. 11), but it was also said of him that he preached the faith (v. 23). The Lord's church of the twenty-first century likewise needs to be busy preaching the one faith that saves (Eph. 4:5).

#### **WHAT IS MADE MANIFEST BY THE LIGHT?**

Brother Tommy Hicks made some pertinent observations about Ephesians 5:11 when he wrote:

It is true that Paul's reference to the 'unfruitful works of darkness' in Eph. 5:11 applies to the immoral practices in the context in which the phrase is found; but, it is ludicrous beyond belief to

limit it to its immediate context in Eph. 5. Common sense should help us to understand this.<sup>4</sup>

In the immediate context of Ephesians 5:11-13, Paul states: “But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks” (Eph. 5:3-4). Why should the saints avoid such unfruitful works of darkness? Paul pointedly declares: “For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any 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” (Eph. 5:5-6).

The immediate context not only consists of those verses just previous to Ephesian 5:11 and 13, it extends to those just beyond them as well. After telling the Ephesians to walk in wisdom, which requires understanding what the will of the Lord is, Paul penned words of warning and instruction, saying: “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18). It is the wise person who does not sip the first drop of alcohol for this verse not only condemns drunkenness, but, more importantly, the process whereby one gets drunk. That is the meaning of the Greek verb *methusko*, which is translated “drunk.”<sup>5</sup> It is an inceptive verb which pictures a growth process that starts with the first drink. Thus, it is Biblical to speak of a person being “one drink drunk.”

Another item in the immediate context that is made manifest and reprovved by the light is *false teaching*. Paul spoke of this in Ephesians 5:6, warning: “Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.” False teaching leads souls astray from the truth (Eph. 4:14). Apparently, some had been telling the Ephesians that sin is not something about which one should be too bothered (cf. Rom. 6:1-2). The same thing is true today, which is why it is so important to heed these words:

Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple (Rom. 16:17-18).

The remote context for Ephesians 5:11-13 includes the rest of the epistle, the other New Testament epistles and the entire Bible. This

would be especially true of Colossians since it is often considered to be a twin to Ephesians. The remote context includes the lists of sins which Christians are told to avoid. In a section of Colossians that is roughly parallel to that found in Ephesians, Paul enumerates some of the more blatant sins God's children must avoid for the sake of their souls. Here, Paul also speaks of putting off the old man and putting on the new man, as he did in Ephesians 4:22-24. Consider the similarities:

Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him (Col. 3:5-10).

Another list of sins made manifest by God's Word is Paul's catalog of the "works of the flesh" in Galatians 5:19-21. There Paul states:

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19-21, KJV).

It is noteworthy that "manifest" means, "readily perceived by the eye or the understanding; evident; obvious; apparent; plain: a manifest error." Since the word "evident" is synonymous with "manifest," the New King James Version appropriately says "the works of the flesh are evident." God tells man that certain sins are obvious. Regarding this, 1 Timothy 5:24 says: "Some men's sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later."

With the use of the phrase, "and the like" (Gal. 5:21), the Holy Spirit contemplated other sins of a nature similar to those listed as works of the flesh. Thus, this is not an exhaustive catalog of sins. The wise disciple of Christ will be guided by godly principles in determining what actions and attitudes should be avoided, exposed and reprov'd. By using the phrase "and the like," numberless unspecified

sins were certainly anticipated. For example, sometimes people will ask: “Where does the Bible condemn the use of marijuana?” Since the word “marijuana” is not found in God’s Word, those wishing to use it think they have found a loophole. Recently, several states have legalized the use of marijuana for medical purposes. Worldly minded souls think the “medical use” provision strengthens their case since Paul told Timothy: “[U]se a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities” (1 Tim. 5:23). Notice it says, “*a little wine.*” Social drinking finds no support from this verse; neither should Christians start using marijuana.<sup>6</sup> Mind altering drugs are condemned in various passages that enjoin sobriety, which literally means to be in control of one’s mental faculties (e.g., 1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 2:6). This is impossible while imbibing alcohol or using marijuana in any manner.

#### **WHAT IS THE LIGHT OF EPHESIANS 5:13?**

In the Scriptures darkness often stands for evil, lies and unbelief. For example, Jesus said:

And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God (Jn. 3:19-21).

Since light and darkness are opposites, light usually represents holiness, truth and belief as in the above passage. The aged apostle, John, also draws the contrast between light and darkness, writing:

This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin (1 Jn. 1:5-7).

John is exhorting his readers to “walk in the light,” and Paul is telling the Ephesians to “Walk as children of light” (Eph. 5:8). Is there any meaningful difference between these two expressions? No. The specific identity of the light, as used in Ephesians 5:13, must be the Word of God, which is the perfect expression of truth and holiness, since it comes from the God Who is light (cf. Jn. 8:12; 9:5).

A good rule of interpreting Scripture is to test a suggested meaning by substitution. In this case, let the reader consider the passage under consideration by seeing if it makes sense to have the Word of God stand for the light. First, notice the emphasis placed upon the Word of God in the life of the Christian, as portrayed in the epistle to the Ephesians. In chapter three, the apostle speaks of the mystery which had been revealed to him. This mystery has reference to the Gospel, which is the Word of God (Eph. 3:1-9). In the fourth chapter, Paul beseeches the disciples to walk worthy of their calling (Eph. 4:1). In 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, it is revealed that one obtains salvation by being called by the Gospel. So, the Ephesians needed to walk worthy of the Gospel, which is also what Paul said to the Philippians (Phil. 1:27). Later, in the fourth chapter of Ephesians, Paul writes about the temporary spiritual gifts that will no longer be needed when the Bible had been completely revealed (Eph. 4:7-13). Then, that great soldier of the cross reminded the church of the need for speaking the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). Surely, this is the same as preaching the Gospel, or the faith. In Ephesians 4:20, the prisoner of the Lord discusses how the Ephesians had learned Christ, saying they had "been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus" (Eph. 4:21). How had the members of the Lord's church at Ephesus learned about Jesus? They had heard the Word of Truth, the Gospel of their salvation (Eph. 1:13). Then, in Ephesians 5:1-2, Paul said the Ephesians should be "imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love." This is very similar to the language John employed in his epistles. How would these converts from a Gentile background learn to live this new life? They needed to conform to the will of God as they had been taught. Again, borrowing a parallel thought from Colossians 2:6-7, notice the connection between walking the new Christian life and the Word of God—"As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving." After telling them to walk as children of light Paul urges them to walk in wisdom, and this requires understanding what the will of the Lord is (Eph. 5:15-17). Indeed, the "light" of Ephesians 5:13 is the Word of God. Nothing else fits the context.

#### **HOW DOES THE LIGHT REVEAL AND REPROVE?**

Light always dispels darkness. Whatever is done in the dark will be exposed when the powerful Word of God shines upon it. There is no

hiding evil when the Gospel is proclaimed. Sadly, upon hearing the truth of God many will hate the light (Jn. 3:19-21). Once a soul hears the truth, he then must make a choice about what he will do with Jesus. About those who will not come to the light, the Lord said:

If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates Me hates My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would have no sin; but now they have seen and also hated both Me and My Father (Jn. 15:22-24).

Man has the ability and the responsibility to choose whom he will serve (Josh. 24:15). Those who decide to obey God will find power in the Word of God to overcome sin. As the apostle Peter said:

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust (2 Pet. 1:2-4).

Or, as Paul wrote: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). When man wants to do better, he will find that the Word of God effectively works in those who believe and obey it (1 Thess. 2:13).

### **CONCLUSION**

Ephesians 5:11-13 is a passage that deserves to be studied in greater depth since it has a lot to say to the world today. Many need to hear that the God of heaven desires for them to escape the moral and doctrinal corruption that has so saturated society. The unfruitful works of darkness abound, as is evident by reading, watching or hearing the news. Instead of taking pleasure in unrighteousness (2 Thess. 2:12) and/or having fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, God’s children need to shine the spotlight of truth on the errors and evil that surround them. God’s Word will not only expose such for what they really are, it will show how to correct them. The Gospel is the power

of God unto salvation. It points out the sin in a man's life—and it provides the remedy by which he can be saved.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are taken from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> Greek word definitions are from *Strong's Concordance Dictionary* in Quick Verse version 4.0, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> All English word definitions are from *Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*, version 3.0, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Tommy J. Hicks, "Does 'Unfruitful Works of Darkness' Apply Only to the Immoral Practices of the Context or to Doctrinal Error and False Teachers as Well? (Eph. 5:11)," *Studies In Ephesians*, ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Publications, Inc., 1997), 512.

<sup>5</sup> W.D. Jeffcoat, *The Bible and "Social" Drinking* (n.p.: published by author, 1987), 93-98.

<sup>6</sup> Jimmie Eaton, "Marijuana," *Living Soberly, Righteously, and Godly: The Gospel Confronts Mordern Moral Issues*, ed. Thomas F. Eaves (Delight, AR: Gospel Light Publishing Company, 1977), 155-160.

# “THE LAMP OF THE WICKED SHALL BE PUT OUT”

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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

“The light of the righteous rejoiceth; But the lamp of the wicked shall be put out” (Pro. 13:9). “The Septuagint translates: ‘The light of the righteous is everlasting; but the light of sinners is quenched.’”<sup>2</sup> The verse to be discussed is found in the book called “Proverbs.” The word “proverbs” is from the Hebrew word, *mashal*.

We are accustomed to think of a proverb as a short, pithy, epigrammatic saying which assumes the status of gnomic truth. In the Old Testament, however, the word *mashal* may be synonymous with an extended parable ... It may refer to an extended didactic discourse ... A person ... or a group of persons ... may function as a *mashal*.<sup>3</sup>

“The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel” (Pro. 1:1), contain practical guidelines for life and provide principles by which we may make wise decisions. Since children are in the formative years of their lives, these proverbs should prove especially helpful to them in making life-affecting decisions.

Proverbs 1-9 provide important information concerning wisdom and stress the importance of wisdom in making decisions. In these chapters we find the background for much of the rest of the book. Chapters 10-15 show the battle that exists between wickedness and righteousness. In these chapters we find helpful information as we face the tough decisions of life. Chapters 16-29 teach us to walk carefully in life and address some of the problems we face. Chapters 30 and 31 contain the words of Agur and Lemuel, respectively. The words of

Agur address various matters concerning men and things. The words of Lemuel contain the famed description of the worthy woman.

The assignment for this study is located in the section of Proverbs (cf. chapters 10-15) which contrasts the wicked with the righteous, and shows the battle that exists between them. From our text, great truths are gleaned that will help us prepare for heaven and avoid hell. Genung observes:

The section 10 1-22 16, with the repeated heading 'The proverbs of Solomon,' seems to have been the original nucleus of the whole collection. All the proverbs in this, the longest section of the book, are molded strictly to the couplet form (the only triplet, 19. 7, being only an apparent exception, due probably to the loss of a line), each proverb a parallelism in condensed phrasing, in which the second line gives either some contrast to or some amplification of the first ... In chs 10-15 the prevailing couplet is antithetical, which embodies the most self-closed circuit of the thought.<sup>4</sup>

Since Proverbs 13:9 employs antithetical parallelism to teach its lesson, we would do well to mention this figure of speech. "Antithesis" "is from the Greek *anti*, against, and *thesis*, a setting. Of this word Webster says: "An opposition of words or sentiments occurring in the same sentence ..." "If at any time there shall be one member of the antithesis which we can understand, we can know what is intended by the other, by knowing that it is the opposite of the one we have described."<sup>5</sup> Studying the verse before us, let us learn every spiritual lesson possible so we may be righteous in our lifestyle and rejoicing in our hearts.

### THE LIGHT AND THE LAMP

"Light" is from "'*owr* (ore) ... illumination or (concrete) luminary (in every sense, including lightning, happiness, etc.)" and "Lamp" is from "*nīyr* (neer) or *nir* (neer); also *neyr* (nare); or *ner* (nare); or (feminine) *nerah* (nay-raw)"; from a primitive root ... properly, meaning to glisten; a lamp (i.e. the burner) or light (literally or figuratively)."<sup>6</sup> Harris observed: "The concept of light in Scripture is important, dealing with personal and impersonal forces on both literal and metaphorical levels. Light is closely related to life and happiness ..." On the term, *nīyr*, Harris wrote: "The words *ner* and *nir* refer to the small bowl-like objects which contained oil and a wick to be lit to provide light ..." <sup>8</sup>

This comparison may be “an allusion to a common custom in the East. ‘No house, however poor,’ says Dr. Geikie (‘Holy Land,’ I. 117), ‘is left without a light burning in it all night; the housewife rising betimes to secure its continuance by replenishing the lamp with oil. If a lamp goes out, it is a fatal omen’ ...”<sup>9</sup> The establishment of David’s descendants on the throne of Israel is spoken of as Jehovah’s giving “him a lamp (*niyr*) in Jerusalem, to set up his son after him, and to establish Jerusalem” (1 Kgs. 15:4; cf. 2 Sam. 21:17; 1 Kgs. 11:36;).

“The two terms *light* and *lamp* may have been purposely used here to express a contrast between the divine wisdom of the righteous and the human sagacity of the wicked ...”<sup>10</sup>

A distinction may be drawn between the “light” of the righteous and the “lamp” of the wicked. The one walks in the “light” of God’s truth, and so his path becomes continually more plain ... the other walks by the glimmer of his own “lamp,” the “fire” and “sparks” of his own kindling (Isa. L. 11), the fancies of his own devising, and so his end is darkness.<sup>11</sup>

In Isaiah 50:11, “flame” is from “*uwr* (ore); from ‘*owr* ...”<sup>12</sup>

The terms, “light” and “lamp,” are used to show a distinction between John and Jesus. Jesus is referred to as “the light” (Jn. 1:7), and “the true light, even the light which lighteth every man” (Jn. 1:9). “Light” is from “*phos* (foce); from an obsolete *phao* (to shine or make manifest, especially by rays ...); luminousness ...” while “Lighteth” is from “*photizo* (fo-tid’-zo) ... to shed rays, i.e. to shine or (transitively) to brighten up (literally or figuratively).”<sup>13</sup> In connection with his bearing witness to the Christ, John is referred to as “the lamp that burneth and shineth” (Jn. 5:35). “Lamp” is from “*luchnos* (lookh’-nos) ... a portable lamp or other illuminator (literally or figuratively), “burneth” is from “*kaio* (kah’-yo); apparently a primary verb; to set on fire, i.e. kindle or (by implication) consume” and “shineth” is from “*phos*.”<sup>14</sup>

While “light” and “lamp” may sometimes be used synonymously, it seems in Proverbs 13:9, they are used antithetically, and are tied to the lifestyles of the righteous and the wicked.

### THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED

“Righteous” is from “*tsaddiyq* (tsad-deek’); from *tsadaq* (tsaw-dak’); a primitive root; to be (causatively, make) right (in a moral or forensic sense); just.”<sup>15</sup> Of *tsadaq*, Vine writes:

... to be righteous, be in the right, be justified, be just." This verb, which occurs fewer than 40 times in biblical Hebrew, is derived from the noun *tsedeq*. Nowhere is the issue of righteousness more appropriate than in the problem of the suffering of the righteous presented to us in Job, where the verb occurs 17 times. Apart from the Book of Job the frequency of *tsadaq* in the various books is small. The first occurrence of the verb is in Gen 38:26, where Judah admits that Tamar was just in her demands: "She hath been more righteous than I; because that I gave her not to Shelah my son."

The basic meaning of *tsadaq* is "to be righteous." It is a legal term which involves the whole process of justice. God "is righteous" in all of His relations, and in comparison with Him man is not righteous: "Shall mortal man be more just [righteous] than God?" Job 4:17. In a derived sense, the case presented may be characterized as a just cause in that all facts indicate that the person is to be cleared of all charges. Isaiah called upon the nations to produce witnesses who might testify that their case was right: "Let them bring forth their witnesses, that they may be justified: or let them hear, and say, It is truth" 43:9. Job was concerned about his case and defended it before his friends: "... though I were righteous, yet would I not answer, but I would make supplication to my judge" 9:15. *Tsadaq* may also be used to signify the outcome of the verdict, when a man is pronounced "just" and is judicially cleared of all charges. Job believed that the Lord would ultimately vindicate him against his opponents Job 13:18.

In its causative pattern, the meaning of the verb brings out more clearly the sense of a judicial pronouncement of innocence: "If there be a controversy between men, and they come unto judgment, that the judges may judge them; then they shall justify [*tsadaq*] the righteous [*tsaddiq*], and condemn the wicked" Deut 25:1. The Israelites were charged with upholding righteousness in all areas of life. When the court system failed became (sic) of corruption, the wicked were falsely "justified" and the poor were robbed of justice because of trumped-up charges. Absalom, thus, gained a large following by promising justice to the landowner 2 Sam 15:4. God, however, assured Israel that justice would be done in the end: "Thou shalt not wrest the judgment of thy poor in his cause. Keep thee far from a false matter; and the innocent and righteous slay thou not: for I will not justify the wicked" Ex 23:6-7. The righteous person followed God's example. The

psalmist exhorts his people to change their judicial system: “Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy” Ps 82:3.

Job’s ultimate hope was in God’s declaration of justification. The Old Testament is in agreement with this hope. When injustice prevails, God is the One who “justifies.”

The Septuagint translates the verb by *dikaiao* (“to do justice, justly, to vindicate”). In the English versions a frequent translation is “to justify” (KJV, RSV, NASB, NIV); modern versions also give the additional translations “to be vindicated (RSV, NASB, NIV) and “to acquit” (RSV, NIV).<sup>16</sup>

The righteous would be the one who is pronounced innocent or just by the Word of God. His lifestyle is such that he conforms to Jehovah’s will. In the case of the man under the Law of Moses, he is the man who hearkens “diligently unto the voice of Jehovah ... to observe to do all his commandments” (Deut. 28:1).

“Wicked” is from “*rasha`* (raw-shaw’); from *rasha`* (raw-shah’); a primitive root; to be (causatively, do or declare) wrong; by implication, to disturb, violate ... morally wrong; concretely, an (actively) bad person.”<sup>17</sup> Of this word, Vine writes:

“... wicked; criminal; guilty.” Some scholars relate this word to the Arabic *rash`a* (“to be loose, out of joint”), although that term is not actively used in literary Arabic. The Aramaic cognate *resha`* means “to be wicked” and the Syriac *apel* (“to do wickedly”).

*Rasha`* generally connotes a turbulence and restlessness (cf. Isa 57:21) or something disjointed or ill-regulated. Thus Robert B. Girdlestone suggests that it refers to the tossing and confusion in which the wicked live, and to the perpetual agitation they came (sic) to others.

In some instances, *rasha`* carries the sense of being “guilty of crime”: “Thou shalt not raise a false report: put not thine hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness” Ex 23:1; “Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness” Prov 25:5. “An ungodly witness scorneth judgment: and the mouth of the wicked [plural form] devoureth iniquity” Prov 19:28; cf. Prov 20:26.

Justifying the “wicked” is classed as a heinous crime: “He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord” Prov 17:15; cf. Ex 23:7.

The *rasha`* is guilty of hostility to God and His people: "Arise, O Lord, disappoint him, cast him down: deliver my soul from the wicked, which is thy sword" Ps 17:13; "Oh let the wickedness of the wicked [plural form] come to an end; but establish the just ..." Ps 7:9. The word is applied to the people of Babylon in Isa 13:11 and to the Chaldeans in Hab 1:13.<sup>18</sup>

The wicked is the one who has been examined in light of Jehovah's Word and has been pronounced guilty by that Word. Under the law of Moses, this is the man who "wilt not hearken unto the voice of Jehovah thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes" (Deut. 28:15). His lifestyle will not conform to Jehovah's Word or will.

### THE REJOICING AND THE RUIN

Having seen the lifestyle of the righteous described as "light" and the lifestyle of the wicked described as "lamp," we now proceed to see the end of these lifestyles. The one who walks in accord with Jehovah's revelation rejoices while the one who walks according to his own standard is ruined.

"Rejoiceth" is from "*samach* (saw-makh'); a primitive root; probably to brighten up, i.e. (figuratively) be (causatively, make) blithe or gleesome."<sup>19</sup> Of this word, Vine writes:

This verb also occurs in Ugaritic (where its radicals are sh-m-h and perhaps in Aramaic-Syriac. It appears in all periods of Hebrew and about 155 times in the Bible.

*Samach* usually refers to a spontaneous emotion or extreme happiness which is expressed in some visible and or external manner. It does not normally represent an abiding state of well-being or feeling. This emotion arises at festivals, circumcision feasts, wedding feasts, harvest feasts, the overthrow of one's enemies, and other such events. The men of Jabesh broke out joyously when they were told that they would be delivered from the Philistines 1 Sam 11:9.

The emotion expressed in the verb *samach* usually finds a visible expression. In Jer 50:11 the Babylonians are denounced as being glad and "jubilant" over the pillage of Israel. Their emotion is expressed externally by their skipping about like a threshing heifer and neighing like stallions. The emotion represented in the verb (and concretized in the noun *simchah*) is sometimes accompanied by dancing, singing, and playing musical instruments. This was the sense when David was heralded by the

women of Jerusalem as he returned victorious over the Philistines 1 Sam 18:6. This emotion is usually described as the product of some external situation, circumstance, or experience, such as found in the first biblical appearance of *samach*: God told Moses that Aaron was coming to meet him and “when he seeth thee, he will be glad in his heart” Ex 4:14. This passage speaks of inner feeling which is visibly expressed. When Aaron saw Moses, he was overcome with joy and kissed him v. 27.

Therefore, the verb *samach* suggests three elements: (1) a spontaneous, unsustained feeling of jubilation, (2) a feeling so strong that it finds expression in some external act, and (3) a feeling prompted by some external and unsustained stimulus.

This verb is used intransitively signifying that the action is focused on the subject (cf. 1 Sam 11:9). God is sometimes the subject, the one who “rejoices and is jubilant”: “The glory of the Lord shall endure for ever: the Lord shall rejoice in his works” Ps 104:31. The godly are to “be glad in the Lord, and rejoice ... and shout for joy ...” Ps 32:11. *Samach* can also mean “to be joyful or glad.” In the place the Lord chooses, Israel is “to be joyful” in all in which the Lord blesses them Deut 12:7. Used thus the verb describes a state into which one places himself under given circumstances. It has a further and technical sense describing all that one does in making a feast before God: “And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days” Lev 23:40.

In a few cases the verb describes an ongoing state. In 1 Kings 4:20 the reign of Solomon is summarized as follows: “Judah and Israel were many, as the sand which is by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking, and making merry.”<sup>20</sup>

“‘The light of the righteous’ is that of their piety, joy, peace, and blessedness, which, beginning here, is perfected in the life to come (Matt. v. 16; Ps. xcvi. 11; cxii. 4; Prov. iv. 18) ... the righteous shine like the sunlight permanently and universally (Job xviii. 5; xxi. 17).”<sup>21</sup> “This light ... is the grace and virtue which adorn the good man’s life, and which beam through all his actions with a cheerful, kindly radiance ...”<sup>22</sup> “The verb is intransitive, and means ‘burn joyfully,’ bright and clear ...”<sup>23</sup>

The righteous are able to rejoice because they are walking by the light (*’owr*) of the lamp (*niyr*) of God (Job 29:3). Fear has been

removed because Jehovah is their light ('*owr*) (Ps. 27:1). Their path is "as the dawning light ('*owr*), That shineth ('*owr*) more and more unto the perfect day" (Pro. 4:18).

*The Contrast, "But"*

Righteousness and wickedness are contrasted in chapter thirteen, and this contrasting helps with the verse under consideration. We learn: "A righteous man hateth lying; But a wicked man is loathsome, and cometh to shame" (Pro. 13:5), and "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children; And the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the righteous" (Pro. 13:22). In Proverbs 13:25, we learn: "The righteous eateth to the satisfying of his soul; But the belly of the wicked shall want." In these verses, we see the good life versus the bad life. The righteous are deliberately doing right, and the wicked are pictured as coming to a bad end.

The end of the wicked is described as being "put out." "Shall be put out" is from "*da`ak* (daw-ak'); a primitive root; to be extinguished; figuratively, to expire or be dried up."<sup>24</sup> In Isaiah 43:17, this word is translated, "extinct." The punishment of apostate Judah is spoken of as Jehovah's taking "from them ... the light ('*owr*) of the lamp (*niry*)" (Jer. 25:10). The fall of "Babylon, the great city" (Rev. 18:21) is described as "the light of a lamp shall shine no more at all in thee" (Rev. 18:23). "Light" is from "*phos* (foce); from an obsolete *phao* (to shine or make manifest, especially by rays ...); luminousness (in the widest application, nat. or artificial, abstract or concrete, literal or figurative)," while "Lamp" is from "*luchnos* (lookh'-nos) ... a portable lamp or other illuminator (literally or figuratively)" and "shine" is from "*phaino* (fah'-ee-no) ... to lighten (shine), i.e. show (transitive or intransitive, literal or figurative)."<sup>25</sup>

This lamp "is devised and lighted by themselves, and has no element of permanence, but soon shall be put out ... The lamp of the wicked is the false show of wisdom or piety, which may glimmer and deceive for a time, but is ere long detected and brought to naught."<sup>26</sup>

Bildad proclaimed: "[T]he light ('*owr*) of the wicked shall be put out, And the spark of his fire shall not shine. The light ('*owr*) shall be dark in his tent, And his lamp (*niry*) above him shall be put out (*da`ak*)" (Job 18:5-6). On this text, Pratt observed: "Light symbolizes ... prosperity, relief ... in contrast with the calamities of the wicked whose 'light ... shall be put out' (Job 18:5) ..." <sup>27</sup> Job asked: "How oft is it that

the lamp (*niyr*) of the wicked is put out (*da`ak*)? That their calamity cometh upon them? That God distributeth sorrows in his anger?" (Job 21:17).

The lifestyle of the wicked is described by Solomon. He says: "For they sleep not, except they do evil; And their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall. For they eat the bread of wickedness, And drink the wine of violence ... The way of the wicked is as darkness: They know not at what they stumble" (Pro. 4:16-17, 19). About the one who would curse his father or mother, Solomon recorded: "His lamp shall be put out (*da`ak*) in blackness of darkness" (Pro. 20:20). For false teachers, "[T]he blackness of darkness hath been reserved forever" (Ju. 13). The wicked man and the false teacher are one in principle of lifestyle. Solomon further recorded that "the lamp (*niyr*) of the wicked, is sin" (Pro. 21:4). Succinctly stated: "[T]here shall be no reward to the evil man; The lamp (*niyr*) of the wicked (*rasha`*) shall be put out (*da`ak*)" (Pro. 24:20).

"The righteous have the true light in them. That which belongs to the wicked is but derived and temporary, and shall be extinguished before long."<sup>28</sup> "The light of the righteous is as that of the sun, which may be eclipsed and clouded, but will continue; that of the wicked is as a lamp of their own kindling, which will presently go out and is easily put out."<sup>29</sup>

"[T]he wicked shall be cut off from the land, And the treacherous shall be rooted out of it" (Pro. 2:22). "[T]he years of the wicked shall be shortened" (Pro. 10:27). "[T]he evil man shall not be unpunished" (Pro. 11:21).

#### A REJOICING LIGHT AND A PUT OUT LAMP

"The light burning in the house or the fire on the hearth are symbols of prosperity and happiness. Their extinction is the mark of disaster."<sup>30</sup> The rejoicing light points to the prosperity of the righteous. The prosperity of the righteous is tied to their relationship to Jehovah. "Jehovah was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man ... And his master saw that Jehovah was with him, and that Jehovah made all that he did to prosper in his hand" (Gen. 39:2-3). Concerning the building of the temple, David charged Solomon: "Jehovah be with thee; and prosper thou, and build the house of Jehovah thy God" (1 Chr. 22:11). Jehoshaphat admonished the army of Judah: "[B]elieve in Jehovah your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye

prosper" (2 Chr. 20:20). Nehemiah encouraged the captives to rebuild the wall by telling them: "The God of heaven, he will prosper us" (Neh. 2:20). The one whose "delight is in the law of Jehovah; And on his law doth he meditate day and night ... shall be like a tree planted by the streams of water ... And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper" (Ps. 1:2-3). The Psalmist exclaimed: "They shall prosper that love thee" (Ps. 122:6). The prosperity of Judah, when they were faithful to Jehovah, is described in Ezekiel 16:6-14. Our giving to God is tied to our prosperity (1 Cor. 16:2). Our prayer for one another and for ourselves should be that we "mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth" (3 Jn. 2).

The put out lamp points to the end of the prosperity of the wicked. Prosperity seems to be the measure of success in our society. As long as one is doing well, materially, he seems to believe he is doing well in every way. But, do the wicked really prosper? Is material success and prosperity the true measure? Solomon knew as much about material prosperity as anyone. Of his material standing, the Queen of Sheba exclaimed: "[T]he half was not told me; thy wisdom and prosperity exceed the fame which I heard" (1 Kgs. 10:7).

"An ancient Greek thought-provokingly said: 'Life is a theater in which the worst people often have the best seats.'"<sup>31</sup> Job was perplexed by the seeming prosperity of the wicked (Job 21:7-21). Of Judah, Jeremiah wrote:

As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit: therefore they are become great, and waxed rich. They are waxed fat, they shine: yea, they overpass in deeds of wickedness; they plead not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, that they may prosper (Jer. 5:27-28).

The works of Judah caused Jeremiah to ask Jehovah: "[W]herefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?" (Jer. 12:1). "[T]he Pharisees ... were lovers of money" (Lk. 16:14). The rich man "was clothed in purple and fine linen, faring sumptuously every day" (Lk. 16:19), yet he went to "Hades ... being in torments ... in anguish in this flame" (Lk. 16:23-24). Some in Paul's day were "supposing that godliness is a way of gain" (1 Tim. 6:5).

[T]hey that are minded to be rich fall into a temptation and a snare and many foolish and hurtful lusts, such as drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil: which some reaching after have been led astray

from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows (1 Tim. 6:9-10).

Truly, “a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth,” because when his soul is required of him, “the things which [he] hath prepared, whose shall they be? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (Lk. 12:15, 20-21). If one lays up for himself “treasures upon the earth ... moth and rust consume, and ... thieves break through and steal” (Mt. 6:19).

Material prosperity can destroy us. T.B. Crews observed:

Prosperity has brought on a generation of petted, pampered, wined and dined church members ... Many of our members demand special treatment, and not wanting to lose them, we pamper them ... through our petting and pampering, we are encouraging those who love themselves above everything else. The value of a soul is often determined by wealth, position, or fame. We find ourselves bowing and scraping to those we don't want to lose from our membership, although they may long since have been removed from the Lamb's book of life.<sup>32</sup>

#### **PASSING ON THE LIGHT AND LAMP**

*Light* and *lamp* in both cases may signify *posterity*. The righteous shall have a joyous posterity; but that of the wicked shall be cut off. So 1 Kings xi. 36 : “And unto his son will I give one tribe, that David my servant may have a *light* (... *ner*, a *lamp*) always before me.” xv. 4 : “Nevertheless for David's sake did the Lord give them a lamp, to set up his son after him.” See also Psa 132:17, and several other places.<sup>33</sup>

Children learn how to be what they become from their parents. Solomon gave great admonitions to children in the book of Proverbs.<sup>34</sup> The righteous will teach the will of God diligently to their children so they may grow up to please God (Deut. 6:6-9). By so doing, they will keep the light burning in the house. The Psalmist exhorts:

We will not hide them from their children, Telling to the generation to come the praises of Jehovah, And his strength, and his wondrous works that he hath done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, And appointed a law in Israel, Which he commanded our fathers, That they should make them known to their children; That the generation to come might know them, even the children that should be born; Who should arise and tell them to their children, That they might set their hope in God, And not forget the works of God, But keep his commandments,

And might not be as their fathers, A stubborn and rebellious generation, A generation that set not their heart aright, And whose spirit was not stedfast with God (Ps. 78:4-8).

The wicked will teach their children how to get ahead in life according to material values. Lying, stealing, cheating will mean nothing to these children. Like Judah, they will be "lying children, children that will not hear the law of Jehovah" (Isa. 30:9). The proverb recorded by Ezekiel describes what the wicked pass on to their posterity: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezek. 18:2). These children become "the children of the violent" (Dan. 11:14). National Israel is a fitting example of the posterity of the wicked whose lamp would be put out. While they claimed to be Abraham's children, Jesus correctly told them: "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham" (Jn. 8:39). As a result of the rebellion of National Israel, their lamp would be put out in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (Mt. 24). They will come to an unhappy end and the lamp will be put out in the house.

### CONCLUSION

The lifestyles of the righteous and wicked are set forth in Proverbs 13:9. These lifestyles are viewed from the standpoint of "light" and "lamp." The lesson is simple. The righteous will shine and the wicked will fizzle out! Is our lifestyle a "light" or a "lamp?" What lifestyle will we teach our children? What will be the end of our lifestyle and that of our children? Each person determines whether he will be a "light that rejoices" or a "lamp that is put out." "Know ye not, that to whom ye present yourselves as servants unto obedience, his servants ye are whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" (Rom. 6:16). Let us work hard to live in such a way that we "may become blameless and harmless, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye are seen as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life" (Phil. 2:15-16). "Lights" is from "*phoster* (foce-tare' ... an illuminator ...<sup>35</sup>

Ye are the light [*phos*] of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a lamp [*luchnos*] and put it under the bushel, but on the stand; and it shineth [*lampo*] unto all that are in the house. Even so let your light [*phos*] shine [*lampo*] before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven (Mt. 5:14-16).

May each one determine to live so that his light shines and that his lamp is not put out!

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are taken from the American Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> Donald Hunt, *Pondering The Proverbs* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1974), 155-156.

<sup>3</sup> R. Laird Harris, ed., *Theological Wordbook Of The Old Testament* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980), 1: 533.

<sup>4</sup> John Franklin Genung, "Proverbs, Book Of," James Orr, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1939), 4: 2472.

<sup>5</sup> D.R. Dungan, *Hermeneutics* (Delight AR: Gospel Light Pub. Co., n.d.), 346-347.

<sup>6</sup> James Strong, *Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1994), Biblesoft.

<sup>7</sup> Harris, 1:25.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:566.

<sup>9</sup> H.D.M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, "Proverbs," *Pulpit Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1961), 9:252.

<sup>10</sup> George Arthur Buttrick, ed., *Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1955), 4:856-857.

<sup>11</sup> Charles John Ellicott, *An Old Testament Commentary For English Readers* (London, UK: Cassell And Company, Limited, 1897), 4:325.

<sup>12</sup> Strong.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> W.E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers), Electronic Version.

<sup>17</sup> Strong.

<sup>18</sup> Vine.

<sup>19</sup> Strong.

<sup>20</sup> Vine.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown, *A Commentary on the Old And New Testaments* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 2.1, 456.

<sup>22</sup> Spence and Exell, 252.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Strong.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Spence and Exell, 252.

<sup>27</sup> Dwight M. Pratt, "Light," I.S.B.E., 3:1892.

<sup>28</sup> F.C. Cook, *The Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), 4:566.

<sup>29</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary On The Whole Bible* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., n.d.), 3:863.

<sup>30</sup> H.H. Rowley, *The Book Of Job* (London, Marshall, Morgan & Scott, Publ. Ltd., 1976), 128.

<sup>31</sup> Johnny Ramsey, "Why Do The Wicked Prosper?" *Gospel Minutes* (April 23, 1971), 4.

<sup>32</sup> T.B. Crews, "Persecution By Prosperity," *Firm Foundation* (October 1, 1968), 628.

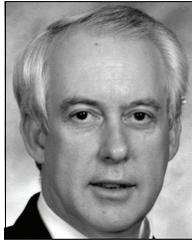
<sup>33</sup> Adam Clarke, *Clarke's Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1824), 3:738.

<sup>34</sup> James Rogers, "Children," *Proverbs, A Handbook For Youth*, ed., Clifford Newell, Jr. (Bristol, VA: East Bristol Church of Christ, 2004), 150-164.

<sup>35</sup> Strong.

# “CALLED OUT OF DARKNESS”

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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light (1 Pet. 2:9).

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue (2 Pet. 1:3).

Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 2:14).

The above texts declare that Christians are a people who have been called of God. They have been called out of darkness and have been called into God’s marvelous light. The above texts also reveal that there is a divine purpose in God’s calling. But, it must be questioned: “What is the meaning of God’s calling?” “How does one know if he has been called of God?” “How does God call us?” And, “What is the purpose and/or benefits of God calling us?” These are matters this section will discuss.

## OUT OF DARKNESS

Prior to discussing some of the particulars relative to God’s calling, attention is directed to the sphere from which Christians have been called. God is calling people “out of darkness” (1 Pet. 2:9). What is this “darkness” from which people are called? Barnes states: “*Darkness* is the emblem of ignorance, sin, and misery, and refers here to their condition before their conversion.”<sup>2</sup> Coffman differs slightly in his

comments. He says: “There is an indication here that many of Peter’s readers were converts to Christ from heathenism, for such is the usual import of the word.”<sup>3</sup> Clarke seems to put both of the statements together by noting: “But they were called to this state of salvation *out of darkness*—idolatry, superstition, and ungodliness.”<sup>4</sup> Gill seems to miss the mark by making the “darkness” refer to the Law of Moses. He wrote:

Out of the darkness of the law, under the former dispensation, which was as night, in comparison of the Gospel day; and out of that darkness which the Jews were particularly in, in and about the coming of Christ, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and the spirituality of the law; having lost all right notions of the Messiah, and the true sense of the Scriptures, and were carried away with the traditions of the elders, and led by blind guides, the Scribes and Pharisees; out of this darkness, as well as what is common to men, in a state of unregeneracy, having no sight of themselves, their sin, and misery, nor knowledge of divine things, of God in Christ, and of salvation by him, and of the work of the Spirit upon the heart, they were called.<sup>5</sup>

After defining the Greek word *skotos* as “darkness,” Thayer comments, “... of ignorance respecting divine things and human duties, and the accompanying ungodliness and immorality, together with their consequent misery in hell.”<sup>6</sup> Woods observed that Peter’s readers “had formerly been idol worshipers.”<sup>7</sup> Having observed the idolatrous practices of the heathens, brother Woods further states: “The words apply, however, to all, both Jew and Gentile, the state of sin being described by sacred writers as conditions of darkness, and Christianity as a world of light.”<sup>8</sup>

The word *skotos* which was used by Peter to describe the previous spiritual condition can have a literal as well as a figurative meaning. When Jesus was crucified there was literal darkness upon the land for three hours (Mt. 27:45). However, it is obvious from the context of Peter’s statement that *skotos* is used in a figurative sense as Peter is not discussing physical conversion, but describing their former spiritual condition prior to their calling.

The Word of God serves as its own best commentary. Paul shows what is meant by spiritual darkness. He penned:

But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient:

but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them. *For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light* (Eph. 5:3-8, emphasis added).

After noting various sins, Paul explains: “For ye were sometimes darkness.” They were “darkness.” Paul used the metaphor “darkness” to describe the sins in which they had involved themselves. “[B]ut now are ye light.” They had gone from being darkness to becoming light. Consequently, they were to “walk as children of light.” Paul further admonished the Ephesians: “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret” (Eph. 5:11-12). Light and darkness are opposites. One cannot walk in both at the same time. John wrote:

If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us (1 Jn. 1:6-10).

John equates darkness with sin and light with righteousness. He explains that the child of God cannot walk in darkness and light at the same time. To claim to have fellowship with Christ and yet walk in darkness at the same time is to make oneself a liar.

#### **HOW DOES GOD CALL ONE OUT OF DARKNESS?**

Since one cannot have fellowship with God if he is in darkness, it is imperative for one to come out of darkness (sin). It is of interest that God is the One Who calls us out of darkness. God is the One Who initiated man’s salvation. Mankind did not (and could not) devise a plan whereby he could be saved. Paul wrote: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9). Again:

For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Tit. 3:3-7).

This is not to say that man has nothing to "do" in order to be saved, for he does have something he must do. When Saul asked: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Jesus replied: "Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do" (Acts 9:6). Both, Saul and Jesus, knew Saul had to "do" something. When Saul reached Damascus, Ananias said to Saul: "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). Jesus Himself stated: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Mt. 7:21). Even though man must do the will of God in order to be saved, he does not merit his salvation. God is the one who gave the plan whereby man can be saved. God is the one who "called" us out of darkness into His marvelous light. It is noteworthy that God is the One who was seeking Adam after he sinned. Adam was not seeking God. In fact, Adam and Eve were trying to hide from the presence of God due to their disobedience. We should ever be thankful that God loves us. Even though we have sinned, God calls us out of spiritual darkness.

In the context of Peter's statement, in addition to being "called" of God, Christians are said to be a "chosen generation." God has "chosen" and "called" people to be Christians. Another Biblical word used in this connection is the word "predestinate." The Word of God plainly teaches that God chooses, predestinates and calls. God chooses us to salvation: "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (2 Thess. 2:13). Christians are predestinated: "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will" (Eph. 1:5). And,

Christians are “called.” “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Pet. 2:9).

God, Who is Sovereign wished to save fallen man. Thus, the question is not “*Does* God choose, predestinate and call people to be saved,” but rather, “*How* does God choose, predestinate and call people to salvation?” There is a difference in the fact of being chosen and/or called, and the method used to do the calling. Note again the verses that inform us of the choosing, predestinating and calling. Paul wrote: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love” (Eph. 1:3-4). God has “chosen us,” notice, “*in Him*.” God chose that all people who are going to be saved must be “*in Him*” (Christ). He chose this plan “before the foundation of the world.” He chose us to be in Christ “that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.” Paul continues: “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved” (Eph.1:5-6). God has predestinated (pre-determined), that we should be adopted by means of Jesus Christ. Again, He (God), is the One Who chose this method. God did not arbitrarily choose certain individuals to be saved and others to be lost. God does not take away man’s will and force him to be saved or lost. In fact, God wills that all people should be saved. Concerning God’s desire for man’s salvation, Paul wrote of God—“Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). Likewise, Peter wrote: “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). Would it not seem strange that God desires all to be saved, then arbitrarily chooses many to be eternally lost? Again, why would Jesus invite all to come to Him, if they could not come to Him? Yet, He invites: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Mt. 11:28-30). Obviously, all

can come to Jesus, otherwise, Jesus would not invite all to come unto Him.

How does God call us? Does God send the Holy Spirit *directly* upon the heart of an individual in order to save him? Fortunately, man does not have to live in doubt relative to God's calling.

But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 2:13-14).

God chose us through sanctification of the Spirit. We have to be "set apart" or "sanctified" by the Spirit. How does God accomplish this sanctification? It is through the Word of God. Jesus prayed: "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (Jn. 17:17). Paul says God "called you by our gospel." People are either deceived or lying when they claim God has called them by some *direct* leading of the Holy Spirit today. The way (method) God uses to call people to salvation is "by our gospel." God is no respecter of persons, consequently, He wants every person to be called. "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mk. 16:15-16). He calls all people by means of the Gospel. God draws all men unto Him by means of "teaching." Jesus said: "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me" (Jn. 6:44-45). Jesus draws people unto Himself by people being "taught of God." The lost rich man in torment wanted Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his five brothers lest they come into torment. Abraham said: "They have Moses and the prophets" (Lk. 16:29) meaning by this they have the writings of Moses and the prophets. The rich man did not have confidence in the power of God's Word. "And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Lk. 16:30-31). The rich man thought it would take a miracle to save his brothers. Abraham (and God), disagreed with the rich man, saying that God's Word was sufficient!

Unfortunately, some today still doubt the power of God's Word to save mankind. They wish for a direct calling from God while rejecting the very means by which God is calling them. In contrast, Paul wrote: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). Whereas God made the tulip a very beautiful flower, man has taken the name of the "tulip" and turned it into an acronym for a very ugly and false Calvinistic doctrine, (i.e., Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace and Perseverance of the Saints).

Since God calls us (by means of the Gospel), does that mean man cannot so sin as to be eternally lost? On the contrary, just as we are saved "conditionally," we continue in the saved relationship with God conditioned on the fact that we walk in the light (1 Jn. 1:7-10). The Christians in the region of Galatia were guilty of removing themselves from the grace of Christ unto another "gospel." Paul said:

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:6-9).

One should notice in the above passage that when one departs from the Gospel of Christ, he departs from the grace of Christ. In fact, Paul explicitly tells them: "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace" (Gal. 5:4). These Christians were turning away from Christ and going back to the law of Moses and in so doing were falling from grace. Peter describes the condition of those who do fall away. He wrote:

For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire (2 Pet. 2:20-22).

These had escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (which means they were saved). Then, they were again entangled and overcome. As a result, the latter end was worse with them than the beginning. Peter, however, gives us an inspired formula to keep us from falling. He wrote:

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:5-11).

Peter tells brethren to make their "calling and election sure." If one's calling and election are sure whether or not one gives diligence, then Peter's admonishment is not necessary. He continued by saying: "[F]or if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." The clear implication is that if we do not do these things, we will fall and we will not have the abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

#### **WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF GOD'S CALLING?**

There are great blessings in God's calling. Peter wrote:

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy (1 Pet. 2:9-10).

The people to whom Peter wrote, were not merely *a* people, but now are *the* people of God! They had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. They are now a "chosen generation." God had chosen them by the Gospel call and their obedience to the same. They were

now a “royal priesthood.” Royalty is theirs because they are connected with King Jesus, and they were priests because of their ability (or right), now given to officiate in worship to God. They are an “holy nation.” They were holy because they were separated or made holy by the blood of Jesus (1 Pet. 1:18-19). Christians are God’s holy nation. The fleshly Jews are not God’s holy nation. Rather, those who are in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, make up the spiritual nation of God (cf. Rom. 2:28-29).

Christians are “a peculiar people,” or as the American Standard Version renders it, “a people for God’s own possession.” What a blessing to be God’s people, to belong to God. John wrote: “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not” (1 Jn. 3:1). Because we are God’s children we have an inheritance. In his first letter, Peter wrote:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Pet. 1:3-5).

Because of all the above mentioned benefits—and many more—we should show forth the praises of Him who hath called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

### CONCLUSION

Christians have been called of God. They have been called by means of the Gospel of Christ (2 Thess. 2:14). They are called out of darkness and into God’s marvelous light. God has delivered us from the “power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Col. 1:13). Man has a choice in his election of God. He is to do the will of the Father (Mt. 7:21). He is to add the “Christian graces” mentioned by Peter, to make his calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:10-11). There are many wonderful benefits as a result of God’s calling (1 Pet. 2:9). Christians have the obligation, as well as the privilege, to show forth the praises of Him Who has called us out darkness into His marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9). May we walk in the light of God’s Word

so that we may enjoy God's blessing now and then one day go to the land where there is no night.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are taken from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament, 1 Peter*, Online Bible Study 4.1.1 (Cross Country Software), 2009.

<sup>3</sup> James Burton Coffman, *Commentary On The Whole Bible*.  
<[www.studylight.org/com/](http://www.studylight.org/com/)>

<sup>4</sup> Adam Clarke, *Commentary on 1 Peter*, Online Bible Study 4.1.1 (Cross Country Software), 2009.

<sup>5</sup> John Gill, *Commentary on 1 Peter*, Online Bible Study 4.1.1 (Cross Country Software), 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek Lexicon*, s.v. "skotos," Online Bible Study 4.1.1 (Cross Country Software), 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Guy N. Woods, *Commentary on the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co., 1973), 6:64.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

# **“GENTILES SHALL COME TO THY LIGHT”**

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## **INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>**

It is an annual delight to come to beautiful Lubbock, Texas, each autumn for this spiritually stimulating lectureship under the skilled oversight of Tommy Hicks. Genuine gratitude is expressed to him, Dale Stone, Malcolm Young and all the treasured saints at Southside for this extended invitation. Southside knows how to make every visitor feel warmly welcome. This is surely true relative to speakers.

To "Walk In The Light" is an idea whose time has come for fruition. Adhering thereunto will help insulate us against walking in darkness where Satan and all his allies have their domain. The apostle John was high in his allegiance toward this noble need. The first chapter in 1 John is filled with just such sentiments (1 Jn. 1:1-10). Light is in the Lord; darkness is in Satan. We decide which will be our accepted realm, and who will be our leader—the Saviour or Satan. Light now leads to that heavenly realm where Jehovah and Jesus form the light (Rev. 21:23). Darkness now leads inevitably to that eternal realm of outer darkness (Mt. 25:30).

## **COMPREHENSIVE PATRIARCHAL PROMISES INCLUSIVE OF "ALL NATIONS"**

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were the three founding fathers of the Israelite nation. The wide scope of redemptive inclusion was vouchsafed to each of these patriarchs in the "Starlight Age." In Genesis 12:1-3, Abraham was given a land promise, a people promise and a Person promise. Palestine was the land promised. The Israelite nation

was the people promised. The Person promise pointed exclusively to the Messiah. In Abrahamic seed shall all families, same as all nations, be blessed. It would not be Abrahamic descendants blessing themselves in fulfillment of such but *one* descendant, namely, the Christ. The inspired Paul made that crystal clear by writing: "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal. 3:16). Genesis 18:17 alludes to this future promise. The Revised Standard Version of 1952 misses this passage badly as it has Abrahamic descendants blessing themselves. The RSV footnote here has it correctly, but perverts what it has in the text. Truth belongs in the text—not just in a footnote! The land, people and Person promises have been fulfilled minutely and precisely, premillennialism to the contrary notwithstanding.

Abraham is not the lone patriarch receiving this Messianic promise. Isaac, Abraham's son, was told: "[A]nd in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 26:4). Galatians 3:16 applies here, just as it did for Genesis 12:3. The RSV missed this passage as badly as it did in Genesis 18:17. Modernistic translators, such as those who produced the RSV, will not give the coming Christ His exclusive position in the scheme of human redemption. They do this in both Testaments. Modernism has never been a friend to God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit or the truth.

Abraham and Isaac are not the only ones in reception of this Messianic promise in Genesis. Jacob, on his way to Padan-Aram, was vouchsafed with this same precious promise. In Genesis 28:14, we read: "[A]nd in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." The RSV tampered with this passage also. Its dense translators know but little about Abrahamic promises and their rich development culminating in Christ. This modernistic version, put out by modernists and to advance modernism, rebelliously refuses to give Christ His rightful due. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were all in the genealogy of Jesus, as we observe in Matthew 1 and Luke 3, but the Messiah—not these three or their descendants—would bring redemptive blessings to all families or all nations of the earth.

Infidelic Jews in the New Testament claimed vigorously to honor, and honor greatly, their three founding fathers. However, they paid no real attention to these Genesis promises, stated with crystal clarity, and what was vouchsafed to each of them. Such is amazingly amazing.

Judaizers in Paul's day could not see an exclusive Saviour in Jesus Christ because statutes from Sinai blinded their eyes. They wanted two lawgivers—Moses and Christ. They wanted two laws—the one from Sinai and the one that began on Pentecost in Acts 2. Passages like Matthew 5:17; Romans 7:2-4; 2 Corinthians 3; Galatians 3; Ephesians 2:14-16; Colossians 2:14-17; Hebrews 10:9 and James 4:12 made no dent in Judaistic thinking. They, the Judaizers, claimed great reverence for the Old Testament. Yet, they paid no attention to the temporary nature of Mosaic mandates or to the crystal clear prophecies relative to the permanence of the coming Christian concepts. They refused to see in Christ that Light, the Christ, who would lighten the Gentiles (Lk. 2:32).

### **ISAIAH KNEW GENTILES WOULD SHARE IN GOSPEL BLESSINGS**

More than any other Hebrew prophet of the Old Testament, Isaiah predicted the coming kingdom of the Messiah with its rich inclusion of Gentiles as well as of Jews. A short biography could be written about the Messiah just from Isaiah's precious portrayal of Him. Isaiah wrote of His Deity, names, character, reputation, mission, kingdom or church, law, sufferings, rejection and His world-wide religion. Isaiah knew the Messiah's religion would be of far greater scope than just Abrahamic descendants. Isaiah 2 is a great kingdom prophecy touching its exalted establishment and the wide coverage of its citizens. Simply, and yet sublimely, he wrote: "[A]nd all nations shall flow unto it" (Isa. 2:2). Arrogant Jews in Christ's era and Paul's time paid no attention to this prophetic utterance. To them the Messianic kingdom would be exclusively Jewish—not Jewish and Gentile.

There are Messianic pointers in Isaiah 42. Some see Cyrus as the fulfillment while others envision Israel the nation. Those two do not fit at all. The Messiah is the servant. He will be the One Jehovah will uphold—not Cyrus, not Israel. Eternal delight, such as Peter portrayed in 2 Peter 1:16-18, rests in the coming Messiah or the Christ. "I have put my spirit upon him ..." (Isa. 42:1) richly includes the whole Godhead. The "I" references the Father. The American Standard Version (1901) capitalizes "Spirit," a clear reference to the Holy Spirit. Reverently and richly this observes fundamental fulfillment in Matthew 3:13-17, as the Spirit, in dove-like form descended upon the recently immersed Son of God. The antecedent of "Him" is the Messiah or the

Christ. The Messiah, when He came, would bring judgment or justice to Gentiles. In Isaiah 42:4, the inspired prophet wrote, "... till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law." Gentiles inhabited the isles—not the Jewish people who populated the land area of Palestine. Isaiah possessed a world-wide view of the coming Messiah. His Jewish readers in the New Testament failed to see this world-wide Redeemer destined to fulfill Isaiah's prophecies. In Matthew 12:17-21, an inspired apostle, Matthew, quoted this very passage from Isaiah 42 and applied it to Jesus—not Cyrus, not Isaiah, not to Old Testament prophets in the aggregate, and not to Israel as John Willis does in *The Transforming Word*.<sup>2</sup> Matthew adds: "And in his name shall the Gentiles trust" (Mt. 12:21). Isaiah knew, and knew perfectly since he was inspired, that Christ would be the Light that Gentiles would see, hear, believe, reverence and obey. They saw Him in the first century; we see Him today by the eye of faith riveted in the Bible. Cyrus, Old Testament prophets in general, Isaiah in particular, and Israel the nation *cannot* fill Isaiah's mold for the Messiah.

Isaiah 49:6 reinforces what Isaiah had already penned. Jehovah, First Person of Deity, spoke to the Second Person of the Sacred Three, with ardency of assurance: "I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth." Passages like these evidently escaped infidelic New Testament Jews who claimed to honor Isaiah and yet hated Jesus whom Isaiah revealed with prophetic reverence and abounding affection. He admired the Messiah long before He came; Jewish peers of Christ hated Him when He did come. Yet, they would have claimed they were in perfect line with Isaiah.

Isaiah 60:3 is a wonderful wrap-up of the Messiah and the luminous light He would bring to an earth filled with the darkness of idolatry, immorality, ignorance, disdain for every vestige of authority, worldliness, secularism and a militant hatred of true spirituality. This cited passage reads so succinctly: "And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising."

Isaiah surely does not have premillennialism, a deadly "ism," in mind in these words of weight and wisdom. Isaiah portrayed prophetically a Victorious Messiah. Militant millennialists project a defeated Deity, a weak member of the Godhead. This mania of madness has the Messiah to come with the full intention of establishing in the first century what a corps of Messianic prophets promised. Millennialists

say Jewish obstinacy thwarted totally Heaven's plan for the Messiah and His establishment of the Kingdom in the first century. False teachers of this absurd "ism" say the Godhead was caught off guard and brought the ticking prophetic clock to a screeching halt. It has not ticked as much as one second since, as per premillennialism. As an after thought, so they contend, the Father and Son brought in a substitutionary device—the church—and tabled indefinitely plans for the Messianic kingdom to be established. According to them, Jesus returned to Heaven as defeated Deity, an inglorious returnee to Heaven on high. And this glorifies God? And this honors Christ? And this reverences the Spirit of truth—the Holy Spirit?

Brother J. Noel Merideth is remembered for having said that there are three senses—inspired, common and non-sense. Premillennialism bats out in a hurry with the first two. Non-sense is written above, beside and underneath premillennial folly! Premillennialism is a blatant system of disbelief and darkness. Yet, a lady in Tennessee once told me I should not be so hard on this movement for, said she: "It is a harmless, innocent doctrine." It is neither! Quite to the contrary it is anti-God, anti-Christ, anti-Spirit, anti-Bible, anti-Gospel, anti-truth, anti-logic and anti-good sense. This is a comprehensive appraisal of this popular and yet poisonous system. It is amazingly amazing that even one person in all history would have been a believer and practitioner of this vain philosophy. Yet, tens of millions still subscribe to its tenets of materialism.

#### MICAH KNEW GENTILES WERE INCLUDED

Micah was an eighth century contemporary of Isaiah. Micah was a country prophet; Isaiah was a city prophet. Yet, they were on the same prophetic wavelength. They believed firmly and fully in the coming kingdom and in the Mighty Messiah who would rule over His redemptive kingdom. Unbelieving Jews in the first century who claimed to honor Isaiah and Micah did not believe what this duet declared in thundering tones relative to the Messiah and His soon to be established kingdom (cf. Mt. 3:2 and 4:17).

In Micah 4, this towering prophet of Judah depicted it as "the mountain of the house of the Lord" (v. 1). It would not be established in the *valley* or even upon *mountain sides*. Quite to the contrary, it would adorn the *mountain top*. It would be "exalted above the hills." Old Testament prophets, New Testament apostles and first century

evangelists *never* bashed this coming kingdom, the church, and they are one and the same. They never demeaned it. They never downsized it. Micah said: "[P]eople shall flow unto it." His broad prophetic vision encompassed "many nations" coming and evangelistically declaring:

Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem (v. 2).

Micah did not have tunnel vision that encompassed Abrahamic descendants alone. Like Isaiah, his was a world vision relative to the Heavenly Light, the Messiah, Who would come into the world.

#### **MALACHI AND THAT COMING LIGHT**

Malachi is the final prophet of the Old Testament. His book closes that portion of the Sacred Canon. Near the end of his treatise of truth he wrote of the coming Christ, depicting Him as "the Sun of righteousness" who would "arise with healing in his wings" (Mal. 4:2). As Creator, He had made the great ball of fire placing it some 93 million miles from planet earth, but in a far greater sense He would be the Spiritual Sun. His light would radiate in Jewish hearts—but not theirs alone. He would shine within Gentile hearts and lives as well.

Old Testament prophets knew well that the coming Messiah would be a world-wide Redeemer and Deliverer. Indeed, He would be the light of the world for Jew and Gentile—not just the Jew alone. Unbelieving Jews contemporary with Christ, and later His apostles, failed miserably to comprehend these crystal clear prophecies from Moses, Isaiah, Micah and Malachi. Jesus stated clearly and concisely:

Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words? (Jn. 5:45-47).

Mosaic writings and the worthy words from Him who is Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace enjoy 100% harmony. Moses did not bash, demean and downgrade the coming Christ. Christ, while here, did not deny that Moses, and subsequent prophets, depicted Him by the marvels of predictive prophecies. What has happened to a growing number of professors in our schools, preachers in our pulpits and shepherds over

our congregations who deny Old Testament portrayals of the coming Messiah? By the way, “Messiah” is a Hebrew term that means the same as “Christ” does in the New Testament. Both kindred terms depict the anointed One. He is anointed as Prophet, Priest and King (Heb. 1:1-3). There are more than 300 Messianic pointers from Genesis 3:15 to Malachi 4:2. Jesus and His New Testament penmen *never* denied a single one of these Messianic prophecies. Jesus fulfilled them and the New Testament penmen gave an enthusiastic and authoritative “Amen” to *all* of them. Liberal professors and modernistic preachers in too many of our pulpits are not on the same page with Biblical scribes. They are in a totally different corner, and that corner overflows with falsehood or damnable error.

#### SAINTLY SIMEON IN LUKE 2 ADDS HIS TESTIMONY

Descriptions of Simeon by Luke were delightful. He was just and devout. He waited for the consolation of Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him signifying his inspiration of what he was about to utter (Lk. 2:25). The Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he would be an eyewitness of the Lord Jesus prior to his own demise (Lk. 2:26). The Holy Spirit led him into the temple, which coincided with the temple visit by Joseph and Mary bringing the child "to do for him after the custom of the law" (Lk. 2:27). Simeon took the precious Babe in his arms of welcome and blessed the Babe's Heavenly Father (Lk. 2:28). He uttered the wise, weighty and wonderful words:

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel (Lk. 2:29-32).

Careful consideration of Simeon's statements will reveal them to be inspired sentiments. He associated Baby Jesus with salvation. It would be the culmination of eternal planning and Old Testament promising/prophesying relative to His first advent. Inspired Simeon saw far more than a Jewish Saviour in the Babe wrapped up in his welcomed embrace. Jesus would be “A light to lighten the Gentiles” (Lk. 2:32). He would bring glory to Israel. Simeon knew, accepted and quoted Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6.

Jesus Christ would be a world Saviour—not just a racial (Jewish) One. Cursed by spiritual myopia, Jewish leaders could not see in the emerging Christ anyone but an imposter, a deceiver, someone to be

condemned (minus justice) and later to be crucified. How blind of spiritual eyesight they were, and their infidelic descendants still are. Unbelieving Gentiles are in the same category of dense darkness.

### PAUL AND THE MESSIANIC LIGHT

Saul of Tarsus, about whom we read in Acts 7:58; 8:1-3; 9:1-2; 26:9-11 and 1 Timothy 1:13-15, associated *no* light at all with Jesus of Nazareth. Deep seated hatred marked his every attitude and action toward Jesus of Nazareth. To Saul, He was *not* God's only begotten Son, and surely *not* the world's Saviour. Saul felt deeply that Jesus was *no* spiritual light to anyone, but that He was a darkened deceiver, an arrogant imposter, and still a dead man entombed in Palestine. Jesus on the Damascus Road changed all that. The Light of the world appeared to Saul in a brightness exceeding the noon time sun in all its brilliance. Saul's darkened soul was never to be the same again. Three days later he became a part of that which the Lord of Glory had depicted as "the light of the world" (Mt. 5:14). He became a member of the church of Christ. His apostolic mission would be within the realm of light as he turned Jew and Gentile "from darkness to light" (Acts 26:18). Never again would he walk in the devilish domain of infidelic darkness toward God's only begotten Son—the marvelous *monogenes* (1 Jn. 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 Jn. 4:9).

Paul's uniform preaching and writing reflect light as centering in the Christ. In his first recorded sermon in Antioch of Pisidia, Paul stated to a hostile Jewish audience:

For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed (Acts 13:47-48).

Several years later, Paul told Agrippa, Festus, Bernice and unnamed dignitaries in Caesarea: "That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:23).

In 2 Corinthians 4:4, 6, reference is made to the,

... light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them ... For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give

the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

The Corinthian people faced many problems and were still walking in darkness as far as some were concerned. Yet, the concerned Paul challenged them to live up to the demands as Gospel lights. Later, Paul will write the Ephesians relative to their being "light in the Lord" and that they are to "walk as children of light" (Eph. 5:8). In the very first epistle he penned, which was written to the Thessalonian saints, Paul told them: "Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness" (1 Thess. 5:5).

#### **THE FORMER MYSTERY MADE CLEAR IN CHRIST AND THE GOSPEL**

"Mystery," in the writings of Paul, did not refer to that which could not be known. Instead, it referred to what had not yet been revealed in a full way. The opening verses of Ephesians 3 open up a vivid vestibule of truth along this line. By revelation, Heaven made known to Paul what this mystery was. When revealed, Paul understood it clearly and he knew Ephesian saints of God likewise could "understand [his] knowledge in the mystery of Christ" (vv. 3-4). Previous ages had not been "in the know," even though there are glimpses of it from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to the time of the major and minor prophets, such as Isaiah and Micah. Yet, blinded Jews refused to see any hint of Gentile inclusion in God's scheme of human redemption. Paul referred to this imperfect knowledge in Ephesians 3:5. Then, he affirmed such has "now [been] revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (v. 5).

Next, he outlines the noble nature of this mystery by writing: "That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel" (Eph. 3:6). In Christianity, Gentiles are not sub-saints; they are not second-rate citizens; they are not inferior to Jews. Quite to the contrary, they belong to the one body. Jesus did not build a church for Jews and another for Gentiles. Jew and Gentile are fellowheirs. They belong to the same body—the church of Christ (cf. Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23-27; Col. 1:18). Both, Jew and Gentile, are equal partakers of the precious promise residing *in* Christ. God's glorious Gospel makes it all possible. Peter did not fully understand the wide sweep of sainthood until Acts 10-11 and the initial conversion of Gentiles—Cornelius and his household. Other apostles and church

leaders in Jerusalem were slow to accept this as we observe in the unfolding events of Acts 11. Judaizers of the first century never did accept it. Acts 15 testifies along this line and so does the gallant Galatian epistle. Paul's lifetime of battles with them present the case in airtight fashion.

#### **ADDITIONAL TESTIMONY FROM THE GREAT COMMISSION**

Matthew's account has all nations included (Mt. 28:19). Mark 16:15 makes mention of "every creature." Luke 24:47 is inclusive of "all nations." The last words of Christ to the eleven apostles on the Mount of Olives makes incumbent on them that the saving Gospel is to be taken to the very ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). All these potent passages combine to prove conclusively that Jew and Gentile were included in the wide sweep of salvation for the whole world. Obedient Jews enjoyed the sweetness of that salvation beginning in Acts 2. Submissive Gentiles did the same beginning with Acts 10.

All of the above is a crushing refutation of Calvinism with its limited atonement concept. How shall we account for Calvinistic blindness about the comprehensive outreach of God's glorious Gospel?

#### **GENTILES WERE BLESSED BEAUTIFULLY IN HAVING THEIR OWN APOSTLE**

This was Heaven's intention relative to Saul or Paul from the time of his transformation from vicious Saul to virtuous Paul. The Lord informed Ananias, the preacher God sent to stricken Saul, that Saul would be a "chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15). Acts 22:15 bears out the wide scope of Saul's apostolic future. Acts 26:17 does more of the same, with both Jews and Gentiles included.

Saul, who became better known as the apostle Paul, fully acquiesced in Heaven's plans for his future course. He was in full accord with Jerusalem pillars, James, Cephas and John (Gal. 2:9), that they were to take the Gospel to Jews and that he and Barnabas would take the soul-saving message to Gentiles. Luke provides this inspired insight of the Pauline mission in Acts 26:16-18, wherein we read:

But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people,

and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

Paul never lost sight of this Gentile mission vouchsafed him. Several years into his apostolic mission, he wrote: "I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office" (Rom. 11:13). He made it his uniform practice to preach Christ and the church "to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). It was his usual custom to go to Jewish synagogues initially and then spread out his labors among the Gentiles. As a general rule, the Jews soon lodged opposition to him and he turned to the Gentiles who, almost always, were more receptive to the Gospel of God.

#### **THERE IS BUT ONE SALVATIONAL PLAN AND ONE CHURCH FOR BOTH JEWS AND GENTILES**

Through the years, false teachers have sought to deny this contending that Peter preached a different doctrine to Jews than he, Paul and others preached to Gentiles. Such is minus an iota of Scriptural authority. There is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God and Father of all (Eph. 4:4-6). These seven ones will not allow an invasion of a plurality. The one faith is the one Gospel. It is for the Jew; likewise, it is for the Gentile.

Acts 2-9 is the record of the conversions of thousands of Jews. They heard or hearkened (Acts 2:14). They were obedient believers (Acts 5:14). They repented of their sins as per Acts 2:38 and 3:19. They confessed their faith in Christ as God's Son (Acts 8:37). They were baptized (immersed) for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38). People on Pentecost who gladly received apostolic preaching were baptized (Acts 2:41). They were added to the one church (Acts 2:47). They continued in faithful and fervent fashion (Acts 2:42).

Beginning in Acts 10, we have Gentiles en masse obeying from their heart that form of doctrine delivered them (Rom. 6:17-18). Devout Cornelius assured Peter that he and all present were eagerly ready "to hear all things that are commanded thee of God" (Acts 10:33). Belief was a marvelous "must," as we see in Acts 18:8 and Romans 10:9-10. Facing a Greek or Gentile audience at Athens, Paul issued words of weight and wisdom how that God now commands all men to repent (Acts 17:30). Confession is taught in Romans 10:9-10. Baptism is seen

in all cases of conversion, stated directly or logically implied. People on Pentecost were baptized (Acts 2). Samaritans and Simon, in Acts 8, were baptized. Saul, in Acts 9 and 22, was baptized. Lydia and her household, in Acts 16, were baptized. So were the jailor and his household in that very same chapter. Corinthians (Acts 18) and Ephesians (Acts 19) were baptized.

All those people—whether they were Jew or Gentile—obeyed the *same* plan and were added to the *same* church, *the Lord's—not man's*.

### CONCLUSION

In the wise words of a beloved song, "The Gospel Is For All"—and indeed it is. For this both, Jews and Gentiles, should be, can be, and are grateful.

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are taken from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> *The Transforming Word*, gen., ed., Mark Hamilton (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2009), 559.

# “THERE IS NO LIGHT IN THEM”

*Joshua Rodriguez*



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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

“O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord” (Isa. 2:5). To no avail the prophet Isaiah uttered those divine oracles of God. Isaiah’s labor in the vineyard of the Lord was crushed at the outset and given little hope for immediate improvement (Isa. 5:1-7; 6:9-12). Yet, to the testimony he was faithful, and to the law he was true! Upon his lips was placed an ember of light to impart understanding and perception (Isa. 6:5-7, 9-10). By the commandment of the Lord, both Judah and Israel were given the ability to “walk in the light,” but instead they chose to trust in the darkness of their ignorance and stumble upon the “rock of offence” (Isa. 8:13-15; cf. Job 12:25). “O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!” (Deut. 32:29). “Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Cor. 10:11). In like manner, our generation has heard the Word of the Lord taught and preached by faithful men of God. However, the Scriptures testify:

[T]he time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry (2 Tim. 4:3-5).

With profound sorrow, it is reported that the Lord's church is abandoning the faith and being swayed through philosophy, vain deceit, the traditions of men, and the elements of the world (cf. Col. 2:8).

Did the peculiar people of God forget the words spoken by Joshua? After the great Canaanite conquest, it was said:

[T]he Lord your God is he that hath fought for you ... For the Lord hath driven out from before you great nations and strong ... no man hath been able to stand before you ... One man of you shall chase a thousand: for the Lord your God, he it is that fighteth for you, as he hath promised you (Josh. 23:3-10).

In the context of Isaiah's time (ca. 730-720 B.C.), the Northern and Southern kingdoms of Israel were confronted by the Assyrian foe (Isa. 7:17-20). Rather than seeking the guidance of Jehovah, they were emboldened in their alliances with pagan nations, deities, and customs (Isa. 8). Because of their insecurities and lack of confidence in God, the Israelites trusted in their own military counsel and replaced the law of testimony for wizardry and witchcraft. Then, the Lord stood to judge His people (cf. Isa. 3:13)—

O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets (Isa. 10:5-6).

To them who loved darkness, darkness was given (cf. Isa. 8:22). Wisdom shouted forth, but none heard her voice. She said: "Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not ... For whoso findeth me findeth life ... all they that hate me love death" (Pro. 8:33-36). As a light that shines in a dark place, so was the prophecy of Isaiah; but, "men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (Jn. 3:19).

#### **ISAIAH CHAPTER EIGHT AND THE NEGLECT OF TRUTH**

The disposition of Israel and Judah are accurately portrayed in the pronouncing of curses found in Isaiah 5:20—"Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness." Israel was blessed above all people. To them were entrusted the divine statements of God (cf. Rom. 3:1-2). Corruption should not have been found in their hearts. The Psalmist declared: "The entrance

of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple” (Ps. 119:130). Israel was well advanced in years as a nation and should have understood the Lord’s expectation of holiness (cf. Lev. 19:2). They did not guard their hearts with all diligence and were unjust, unholy, and unmerciful (cf. Isa. 59:3-15). For the reasons previously stated, Jehovah God sent Isaiah to testify of the impending judgment, and to enforce the Mosaic Law. Israel’s sin was full and the wrath of God was coming as a mighty wave to sweep away the ungodly.

*The Significance Of Isaiah’s Son Mahershalalhashbaz (Isa. 8:1-4)*

Before the birth of his second son, Isaiah was commissioned to write upon a great scroll concerning the meaning of his son’s name, Mahershalalhashbaz (v. 1).

In this chapter Isaiah’s own name and the names of his two sons are given prophetic significance by God himself (see 8:18). *Isaiah*, meaning “The Lord will save,” refers to Israel’s eventual restoration. *Shear-jashub*, meaning “A remnant will return,” refers to Israel’s return to the land after various deportations. *Maher-shalal-hash-baz*, meaning “Swift to the plunder,” refers to the destruction of Judah’s enemies.<sup>2</sup>

Isaiah recorded his prophecy at the mouth of two witnesses, Uriah and Zechariah, in an effort to substantiate its validity (v. 2). His wife conceived and bare a son to whom was given the name Mahershalalhashbaz, which means “in making speed to the spoil he hasteneth the prey” (v. 3). According to the significance of Isaiah’s son’s name, the prophecy revealed the speedy overthrow of Israel’s allies and Judah’s enemy (v. 4; cf. Isa. 7:1-9). In the space of one to two years, the Lord would summon the fearsome Assyrians to break the strength of Syria and Ephraim, punishing Judah (cf. Isa. 7:17-25).

*The Significance Of Isaiah’s Prophecy And Warning (Isa. 8:5-16)*

From Isaiah’s declaration of judgment against Syria and Israel, all those who secretly supported the efforts of Judah’s enemies should have understood the futility of their backbiting against the house of David. In Jerusalem, on the east side, the Gihon Spring in the Kidron Valley was directed toward the south western tip of the city forming a reservoir known in Biblical times as Shiloah. The flow of the aqueduct was peaceful, compared to the Euphrates River, which was violent and frequently flooded causing great damage (vv. 5-8). The comparison of these two was symbolic of Judah in Jerusalem and Assyria in the

Mesopotamian Valley. The prophecy makes use of the infamous flash floods of the Euphrates River and likens that to the Assyrians who would forcefully overflow the territory of Judah. Although the Assyrian foe would fill the land, God promised they would not entirely overthrow it (v. 8). They would reach the "neck," which is to suggest an incomplete destruction of Jerusalem. God still had Babylon in mind for future punishment over the entire land (cf. Isa. 13:1-5ff).

The alliance of Syria and the Northern tribes of Israel anticipated the Assyrian invasion and deliberated concerning the best strategy of war. Yet, no wisdom or military genius was able to withstand the judgment of God. All associations or affiliations could not undo what Jehovah allowed in the campaigns of Assyria (Isa. 8:9-10). Even the best of Syria's counsels could not stand against the God of Judah. The Lord directed Isaiah to boldly command no "confederacy," and not to fear the terror of their enemies (Isa. 8:11-13). Certainly, this was a daunting task. The people's imagination would have molested them and cowardice would have spread like wildfire. Lest they despaired, Judah was commanded to "sanctify the Lord of hosts." That is, distinguish Him from all other deities and worship Him only. He would be a sanctuary for the righteous, but a stone of stumbling to the unbelieving Jews. Isaiah's prophecy concluded by being bound and sealed while the prophet waited for the coming of the Lord (Isa. 8:16).

*The Significance Of Isaiah's Prophetic Conclusion (Isa. 8:17-18)*

Although the prophecy signified an immediate punishment upon the people of Israel and Judah, Isaiah did not depart in fear. He embraced the coming of the Lord. He knew of God's justice and mercy. Hence, he said: "I will wait upon the Lord" (v. 17). In the prophetic utterance of Habakkuk, God knew His message would chase away those who read it (Hab. 2:2). But still, the Lord said: "[T]hough it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come" (Hab. 2:3). Still further, Isaiah was certain that Jehovah would restore peace regardless of His face being turned against them (cf. Isa. 54:7-8). Instead of giving up and feeling hopeless regarding the people of Israel, the prophet said: "I will look for him" (Isa. 8:17). Sin and guilt may cause discouragement, but if we desire to be with our God, we will rise up as often as we fall (cf. Pro. 24:16). As an even greater emphasis, Isaiah reiterates that the Lord blessed him with two sons whose names are the sum of the current prophecy.

*The Significance Of Isaiah's Rebuke And Condemnation (Isa. 8:19-22)*

In making a league with pagan nations, the Israelites also absorbed their religious practices. It was customary for the heathen to seek consultation from their gods in agriculture, seasonal changes, and especially in war. These practices characterized the Canaanites at the time of their destruction. Thus, the law was given: "Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them: I am the Lord your God" (Lev. 19:31; 20:6, 27). In times of great anxiety even king Saul succumbed to the sin of witchcraft (cf. 1 Sam. 28:3-20). Upon hearing that the Assyrians would come, so did the Syrians, Israel, and Judah fret like Saul! Instead of going to Jehovah God, Who delivered them in the past and blessed them with their land, the people of God straightway listened for the twitching and mumbling of demons. They sought the dead of which the Scriptures declare: "[T]here is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave" (Ecc. 9:10). The foolish instruction obtained by Israel and Judah would later cause them to curse their king and blame God because it was powerless. The Lord was not to blame, but their rebellion and rejection of the Mosaic Law was. Lifting up their eyes to a land once filled with fatness, they were promised, "trouble and darkness, dimness of anguish" (Isa. 8:22). Later, God declared: "[T]here is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let it?" (Isa. 43:13).

"To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20). The law of God is perfect and His testimony is sure (Ps. 19:7). Yet, the people did not consent to it, they were determined to neither believe it, nor to pattern their lives after it. The Israelites had the Law of Moses and the prophets to hear if they wanted to know the right course of action, but they consulted the dead (cf. Lk. 16:29-31). The Word of God was the standard for them—as it is for us, today. Death would be the consequence of their sins. Yet, the people did not put away the evil from among them. Hence, God was bringing the Assyrians to show His indignation! The people of Israel did not speak according to God's law because their hearts were darkened with corruption; their minds were filled with mischief, their eyes with lust, their mouths with cursing, their stomachs with gluttony, and their bodies with immorality. Their logic had become illogical, their doubts utter confusion, and their reasoning as bulwarks against the truthfulness of God's testimony. If

they had any ray of light in the past, it was dimmed and put out by their wickedness. Never again would Israel's light shine in its full glory—that is, until the revelation of Jesus Christ the Son of God. Although the Assyrian invasion was devastating to the nation of Israel, the Lord's church must learn several lessons from their mistakes, if we are to walk in the light of the Lord.

### THE SOURCE OF SPIRITUAL ILLUMINATION

All the descriptions of God are associated with light. Even though no man has seen God, the Scriptures share glimpses of His glory and majesty. In one passage the Lord's expressions or countenance is *light* (Ps. 4:6; cf. Num. 6:24-26). In another, He covers Himself with *light* as if it is a garment (Ps. 104:1-2). In 1 John 1:5, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." He is, "the Father of lights, with whom is no variability, neither shadow of turning" (Jas. 1:17). God, the Father and the Son, dwell in *light* unapproachable (1 Tim. 6:16). In the eternal home of the saints, Jehovah will be an everlasting *light* (Rev. 21:23; 22:5; cf. Isa. 60:19-20). He is the *Light* of lights and to Him all other sovereign lights bow in reverence (Ps. 148:3; cf. Gen. 1:16).

Not only are these descriptions of God's person, but also of His moral character. Light is an attribute of holiness and thus a personal quality maintained by the Godhead. A characteristic of light is that it reveals truth, which is a quality of the Godhead (Jn. 14:6; Heb. 6:18; Tit. 1:2). To walk in the light, according to the apostle John, it was necessary for the truth to be practiced (cf. 1 Jn. 1:6, 8). The devil does not abide in the truth and neither do his children (Jn. 8:44). In contrast, Jehovah is the "God of truth and without iniquity" (Deut. 32:4; cf. Ps. 31:5; Isa. 65:16). Hence, the Bible reveals the twin characteristic of the Lord; "God is true," and "God is light" (Jn. 3:33; 1 Jn. 1:5). To this we must also add a third equivalent trait, "God is love" (1 Jn. 4:8). The divine attribute of love is a manifestation of light, and light is the product of performing truth. "He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him" (1 Jn. 2:8-11; cf. 1 Jn. 3:18-19). Thus, these three qualities—love, truth, and light—are interdependent and make up the moral nature of God.

The Lord desires for His light to become our light, and His righteousness to become our righteousness. He is the source of all spiritual illumination; thus, it is written: "[I]n thy light shall we see light" (Ps. 36:9). David declared: "The Lord is my light and my

salvation” (Ps. 27:1). This was true for the entire nation of Israel. Yet, in Isaiah’s day, the people had become so devoid of truth that they groped in darkness (cf. Isa. 59:4, 14-15; Jer. 5:1-5; 7:28). No longer did they speak according to the law and testimony, truth was cast off and falsehood embraced. This continued until the time of Christ and, at His coming, truth was restored. “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). The Gospel Jesus delivered brought life and immortality to light (2 Tim. 1:10). Thus, He declared to the world: “I am the light” (Jn. 8:12). He is the brightness of His Father’s glory (Heb. 1:3). He is “the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (Jn. 1:9). Upon the “Mount of Transfiguration,” the essence of His deity shined as the sun and He revealed, for a brief moment, the light in which He dwells (cf. Mt. 17:1-5). Every faithful disciple of Christ is now a reflection of Him. “For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light” (Eph. 5:8). If there is no light in us it is because we are not mirroring the image of Christ, nor are we imitating the fullness of His qualities. Therefore, the church is exhorted to be “blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life” (Phil. 2:15-16). God is the source of illumination. His Son shines through us and, by the truth of His Word, we are sanctified and walk in the light!

#### **THE ILLUMINATION OF DIVINE INSTRUCTION**

The Word of Truth is a system of light that comes to the intellect (or mind) through divine instruction. Light and truth are synonymous and only they can guide our way in life. Like the Psalmist pleading to God, the Christian should say: “O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me” (Ps. 43:3). There was no light in Israel because there was no truth. When Isaiah warned the Israelites of the Assyrian invasion they did not speak according to truth because they knew it not. Their minds were not developed in the divine system of morality. As in the time of Job: “They are of those that rebel against the light; they know not the ways thereof, nor abide in the paths thereof” (Job 24:13). Israel was in moral confusion. They knew not the difference between good and evil, light and darkness, sweetness and bitterness (Isa. 5:20). Through Isaiah, the Lord was giving them an opportunity to know the

way in which they should walk, but they refused (cf. Jer. 6:16). Instead of refusing, they should have petitioned the Lord saying: "Shew me thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day" (Ps. 25:4-5). To the law and to the testimony all men should go, in times of sorrow and in times of comfort. By His Word, God was granting Israel sanctuary, and He does so for us today. The Law of the Spirit of life makes us free from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:2). God grants His church sanctuary from the wrath to come. Yet, does the Law of the Spirit govern our minds? Or, are we just as ignorant as Israel when they began to fret? Even more, are we able to rightly divide the Word of Truth (cf. 2 Tim. 2:15)? Or, do we twist the Scriptures unto our own destruction (cf. 2 Pet. 3:16)? Are we guilty of consulting seducing spirits and doctrines of devils, like Israel consulted the dead (cf. 1 Tim. 4:1)? Or, do we appeal to the Spirit of Truth (cf. 1 Pet. 1:22)?

The process by which we receive spiritual illumination is not through a providential guiding of the Holy Spirit, nor is it separate and apart from the Word. To claim that a Christian cannot understand the Word, except he has the leading of the Holy Spirit "in conjunction" with the Word, is like Israel seeking truth from demons! Let us piece together the system of light that comes from the Bible's instruction. God created man with several capacities for education. Man is able to read (cf. Eph. 3:3-4), he is able to reason (cf. Isa. 1:18), he is able to understand (cf. Eph. 3:3-4), and he is able to obey (cf. Ecc. 12:13). The Lord complements these mental faculties by supplying His Word. His Word must be read (cf. Isa. 34:16; 1 Thess. 5:27), it must be reasoned with (cf. 2 Cor. 10:3-5), it must be understood (cf. Eph. 5:17), and it must be obeyed (cf. 2 Thess. 3:14). When man pursues the knowledge of God by utilizing these faculties the natural result will be light and understanding. Psalm 119:130 declares: "The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple." When we were born we did not possess the knowledge of good and evil (cf. Deut. 1:39). Hence, we were simple-minded. God's Word is designed to teach man the ability to make proper judgments thereby releasing him from simplicity. In the book of Hebrews, this was a topic of great concern. Through a habitual application of God's Word, man would strengthen his ability to distinguish right from wrong (Heb. 5:11-14). This power would not come instantaneously, or as help "supra-literarily," but over time in the natural process of spiritual education. Just before the

conclusion of his second epistle, Peter explains how members of the church can keep themselves from being led away with the error of the wicked (2 Pet. 3:17). He writes: “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). Divine instruction is a process that only continues if we diligently pursue the study and proper interpretation of the truth (cf. 2 Tim. 2:15). Still further, Jesus explained that knowing truth is contingent upon whether or not we continue in His Word (cf. Jn. 8:31-32). For this reason, “the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Ps. 19:8). Figuratively speaking, the truth of God’s Word acts like a lamp that gives clarity to every situation in life (Ps. 119:105; Pro. 6:23). The instruction of God teaches us “righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path” (Pro. 2:1-9). The spiritual illumination obtained by a study of God’s Word is a mental and moral enlightenment. “Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light” (Eph. 5:14). This is what Israel lacked in Isaiah 8:20. They rejected knowledge, truth was fallen in the streets, and they were corrupt. Our generation is demonstrating the same attitude toward God today.

The chain of authority begins with God, the Father. He is the head of Christ (1 Cor. 11:3). He gave His Word for Christ to speak (cf. Jn. 12:49-50). In the past, the Lord spoke through prophets, but now in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son (Heb. 1:1-3). Jesus promised His apostles that they would have special help from the Holy Spirit, and that the Spirit would speak only what He heard from the Father (cf. Jn. 16:13). Throughout the entire mission of the Holy Spirit, the Word always emphasized salvation. The apostles were then given the charge to take the law and the testimony to the world. For by the Word, men would be sanctified and saved (cf. Jn. 17:8, 14, 17, 20). By the Word that came from God, man has the doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction that he needs in every aspect of life and righteousness. (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17). The Word is now given to us. Will we strengthen the light within us, or will we cause it to grow dim by neglecting God’s Word? If we accept His truth, then the end result will be spiritual illumination. If we reject His Word, there is no light in us!

### CONCLUSION

The people of God must maintain their light. The Bible says: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and

glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Mt. 5:16). Light is the source of all joy, life, and blessings in one's physical, as well as his spiritual, being. Hence, we would do well to remember daily that God is our light. We must reflect His Son. Our nature must put on true righteousness as we learn the truth, obey the truth, and walk in truth. It is possible for the people of God to once again be found without light dwelling in them. Thus, let us read, let us reason, let us understand and obey the Word of Truth. May we allow the light to shine in our hearts and never doubt the counsel of God.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are taken from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> H.L. Willmington, *The Outline Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1999), Isa. 8:1-22.

# “HE PROMISED TO GIVE A LIGHT TO HIM”

*Don Walker*



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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

There was nothing in David’s stature that would indicate his fitness to serve as king. Yet, it was not the outward countenance that God looked upon. Rather, we learn it was what was inside of the man that concerned Jehovah. The Lord said to Samuel (in regard to Eliab, David’s older brother): “Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7). By the process of elimination, David was chosen and anointed as the next king. From that point on, David’s life was a difficult one, full of God-given victories, which were accompanied by many disappointments. One of David’s greatest disappointments had to be Absalom’s revolt against him and his subsequent death. However, it was Absalom’s death that led to David’s ultimate placement as king over all of Israel.

In the midst of the details surrounding David’s being accepted as king, a striking event unfolded. In 2 Samuel 20, during the tribal arguments going on in Gilgal, a Benjamite, named Sheba, proclaimed: “We have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse” (2 Sam. 20:1). We are confident that Sheba knew neither the implications nor the ramifications of his statements on that day.

## PROMISES MADE BY JEHOVAH

After David’s tumultuous reign, his son Solomon rose to the throne to reign for forty years. Solomon’s time was a time of peace and

prosperity following David's great conquests. However, shortly after the death of Solomon, the kingdom was rent asunder. Rehoboam's foolishness, and Jeroboam's seizing of the opportunity, provided the catalyst for the events to unfold as they did. The combination of those events again served to test Jehovah's promise, the promise which He had made beginning with Abraham and coming down to David. During the time of the events surrounding the dividing of the kingdom, Jehovah promised: "And unto his (Solomon's, DWW) son (Rehoboam, DWW) will I give one tribe, that David my servant may have a light always before me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen me to put my name there" (1 Kgs. 11:36).

It may very well be that Jehovah's promise made to David was *directly* tested more than any other promise He made. During the times of the two Jehorams, one the king of Israel and the other the king of Judah, both kingdoms were exceedingly wicked before the Lord. It was said of Jehoram of Judah: "And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, like as did the house of Ahab: for he had the daughter of Ahab to wife: and he wrought that which was evil in the eyes of the Lord" (2 Chr. 21:6). It would be because of this wickedness that Israel would go into captivity. It is also here that we see a prophecy made by Jehovah concerning Judah and the seed of David. Notice the following two passages which reaffirm what God had promised unto David.

Howbeit the Lord would not destroy the house of David, because of the covenant that he had made with David, and as he promised to give a light to him and to his sons for ever (2 Chr. 21:7).

Yet the Lord would not destroy Judah for David his servant's sake, as he promised him to give him always a light, and to his children (2 Kgs. 8:19).

In these verses, and if we include the 1 Kings 11:36 passage, we are reminded of many great Messianic truths. Yet, the material that must be studied neither begins nor ends with these passages.

As we embark upon a detailed study of these promises, our attention will first be turned to the beginning of these promises. Then, we will work our way forward.

### **DAVID'S DESIRE AND GOD'S PROMISES CONCERNING THE HOUSE OF THE LORD**

In 2 Samuel 7, we learn that the Lord had given rest to David from all of his enemies. In this setting, David desired to build a house for the

Lord and he approached Nathan the prophet concerning his thoughts. Nathan spoke hastily and promised that the Lord was with David and that he should proceed with his plan. However, the Lord appeared to Nathan and let him know that David's plans were not to be. David would not build a house for the Lord. That task would be left to his son, Solomon. It is in this setting that Jehovah makes David a promise. To David, Jehovah promised:

And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever (2 Sam. 7:12-16).

This passage serves as a foundation for the remainder of our study. As we consider this passage, we see that promises concerning David's seed, the building of a house, and the establishment of a kingdom are made. It is significant that these are the very matters that will be ever before our minds as we follow the descendants of Abraham and David in the pages of Holy Writ.

Before we turn our attention specifically to the statements made by Jehovah in 1 Kings 11:36, 2 Chronicles 21:7 and 2 Kings 8:19, we need to further notice the roadblocks that had to be overcome for Jehovah to fulfill His promises. Noticing such opposition, and God's activity in overcoming that opposition, will only add to the power of God's statements, and it will make the light shine even brighter.

#### **EVEN GREATER TESTS WOULD FOLLOW**

Before 805 B.C., the major threat to the Northern Kingdom of Israel was Syria. However, in 805 B.C., that changed because Abad-narari III of Assyria defeated Damascus, the capital of Syria. For the next 60 years, Israel was at relative peace. Assyria's expansion was minimal, if not dormant all together.

It was during this time that Jeroboam II of Israel began his reign (782 B.C.). During his reign, the borders of Israel were spread to cover, for all practical purposes, the same territory as Solomon's kingdom.

The result of this peace and expansion was great prosperity. Israel had control over the trade routes and during this time an affluent, wealthy upper class developed. All things looked bright for God's people, at least in the physical arena. Spiritually, she was running farther and farther away from her God, Jehovah.

It was in this setting that the prophet Amos was sent to Israel to prophesy. Although Amos was from the Southern Kingdom, he was sent to the Northern Kingdom with a message of doom. Other prophets who had the task of warning Israel of that which loomed on the horizon were Micah and Isaiah. Hosea was also sent on the eve of the Assyrian aggression.

In 745 B.C., the political landscape changed. Tiglath Pileser III ascended to the throne and, at that point, Assyrian expansion resumed on a large scale. The times were very unstable, and in 721 B.C., Samaria, the capital of Israel fell and the Northern Kingdom was exiled. A significant point to keep in mind here is that the Northern Kingdom, at this point in time, lost its national identity and never regained it.

#### **JUDAH AVOIDS ASSYRIAN CAPTIVITY**

Though Micah and Isaiah both spoke of Israel's captivity at the hands of the Assyrians, their prominent task was directed toward Judah, the Southern Kingdom. Judah could often be compared to what Israel had done. She spurned God's will and followed the idols of the pagans, just as Israel did. However, there were some very significant contrasts. After Israel fell, under the guidance of Sennacherib, assault was made against Judah. In 2 Kings 18:14-16, we see that Hezekiah submitted to the tributary that was laid upon him and Judah. This passage states:

And Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria to Lachish, saying, I have offended; return from me: that which thou puttest on me will I bear. And the king of Assyria appointed unto Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. And Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasures of the king's house. At that time did Hezekiah cut off the gold from the doors of the temple of the Lord, and from the pillars which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria.

Yet, Sennacherib was not satisfied. He continued his aggression with the desire of the subjugating Hezekiah and Jerusalem, the capital of Judah. James E. Smith wrote:

Sennacherib had little difficulty conquering all the fortified cities of Judah. By his own count there were forty-six such cities. The Assyrian had his headquarters at Lachish, about twenty-five miles southwest of Jerusalem. While Sennacherib remained at Lachish directing the attack against Philistia, he dispatched three of his top officers, the Rabshakeh, Tartan and Rabsaris (2 Kgs 18:17) with enough troops to intimidate Hezekiah. Isaiah emphasized the irony that the Rabshakeh (NIV “field commander”) challenged the trust policy of Hezekiah in the very spot where some thirty-three years earlier Isaiah had challenged King Ahaz to commit himself to such a policy.<sup>2</sup>

Sennacherib’s goal was to gain the victory by overthrowing Jerusalem and Hezekiah. Sennacherib sent his ambassadors who promptly insulted Hezekiah and his God, Jehovah. Upon this threat, Hezekiah prayed to Jehovah and his prayer was heard. The account of Judah’s deliverance is set forth in 2 Kings chapters 19 and 20.

And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh. And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword: and they escaped into the land of Armenia. And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his stead. In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live. Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the Lord, saying, I beseech thee, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore. And it came to pass, afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of the Lord came to him, saying, Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the Lord. And I will add unto thy days

fifteen years; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake (2 Kgs. 19:35-20:6).

As we close the latter verses of this context, we are reminded of those promises Jehovah had made many years earlier.

### **BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY WAS NOT AVOIDED**

Even though Judah did not fall to the Assyrians, she was not able to avoid captivity altogether. In his prophecy, Jeremiah would center upon Babylonian captivity. His prophecy was basically a revealing of three options that stood before Judah. First, captivity could be avoided altogether if Judah would repent. As it became clearer that that would not happen, Jeremiah's prophecy evolved. The message became that if Judah would accept captivity as God directed, and submit to it, then the burden of captivity would be lightened. They could continue to dwell in their own houses and continue to reap the bounties of their fields. Yet, Judah's heart was hardened to the point that they were unwilling to submit even to this. Finally, Jeremiah's message was that captivity is certain, displacement will be a fact, and there is nothing they can do about it. On the surface, it must have appeared that Judah's fate was no different than that of Israel.

The similarities, however, were not as abundant as one might think. As consistently as Jeremiah spoke of the certainty of captivity, he also spoke of a return from captivity. Captivity would last only seventy years. Prophets such as Isaiah, Micah, and Ezekiel also spoke of the certainty of a return. Significant to our study is the fact that the promised return from captivity *was not* based upon the goodness of Judah. With the exception of a few good kings, there was really no difference between Judah and her sister Israel. No, the promise was not made because of Judah's goodness, but more specifically because of the promises made by Jehovah to the “man after his own heart” (1 Sam. 13:14)—David.

### **DAVID'S PROMINENCE**

With the development of a Messianic bloodline in the Old Testament came an excluding of certain ones, as well as a narrowing of possibilities, and there was a specificity concerning the ones through whom the Messiah would come. The very first Messianic prophecy (Gen. 3:15) not only points to woman's part in the bringing of the Messiah, it also eliminates man. It was stated that it would be the “seed

of woman,” not of man, as was the norm. Then, in Genesis 22:18, not only was Abraham set forth, but all other families were eliminated. Again, we see Isaac brought to the forefront in Genesis 21:12, but we also see Ishmael excluded. In Numbers 24:17, Jacob was “loved” and Esau was “hated.” Genesis 49:10 marks the tribe of Judah and, in so doing, the other eleven tribes were eliminated. Continuing, we see it would be the seed of Jesse (Isa. 11:1, 10), but not just any seed. Jesse had at least eight sons and all of them were eliminated, all with the exception of David. David would be the chosen one (Jer. 23:5; Ps. 132:11; 2 Sam. 7:12-16).

At this point, there seems to be a greater significance placed upon David. It is as if a magnifying glass was placed upon this great servant in the Old Testament. When Matthew wrote his account of the Gospel, he addressed it to the Jews. It is therefore no surprise that he would open with the genealogy of Christ. What might be somewhat of a surprise is that in the introduction of that genealogy—in the very first verse of the book—he wrote: “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Mt. 1:1). Is there any significance in David’s being mentioned before Abraham? The question might not even be raised were it not for the fact that there is a strong emphasis in the New Testament concerning the Davidic line.

In Matthew 22, Jesus was tried by the religious leaders. In each instance, He silenced His critics with the simplicity of His logic. As the chapter closes, Jesus asked the Pharisees a question. Their answer is germane to our discussion. Jesus asked: “What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David” (Mt. 22:42). In studying the four Gospel accounts, we are impressed with the fact that this is no isolated example, but it is seen consistently. In the minds of the Jews, Christ would be the Son of David.

In the preaching found in the book of Acts, the Davidic bloodline is leaned upon heavily. Acts 13:34ff can serve as an example of what is found throughout the preaching of our first century brethren. When preaching that Christ rose from the dead, David is introduced into the discussion. Even in the close of the New Testament, when we are allowed a peek into the throne room, we behold “a Lamb as it had been slain” standing (Rev. 5:6). This Lamb is said to be “the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David” (Rev. 5:5). It is as if the Jews of the first century, and even our brethren, had placed a magnifying glass

upon this shepherd lad who rose to the throne. The reason seems all too obvious. It is because God exalted David in the Old Testament.

### THE HOUSE OF DAVID

In 2 Chronicles 21:7, we read that Jehovah "would not destroy the house of David." This statement is contrasted with 2 Kings 8:19, which says that Jehovah "would not destroy Judah for David his servant's sake." David and Judah were linked together. The house of David is the same as Judah. Jehovah had promised David, years earlier, to build him a house (2 Sam. 7:12-16). In that passage, he also promised that "thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever" (v. 16).

In the context of these passages, it seems that both Israel and Judah deserved to be destroyed because of wickedness. Yet, David's house would still stand. This was because of God's promise to David.

As we shine the light of the New Testament upon these two passages, we soon come to realize that the house of which He speaks is "the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). In that light, there is an interesting prophecy found in the Book of Amos. In that prophecy, God said:

In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the Lord that doeth this (Amos 9:11-12).

We would have no idea what that passage meant were it not for the fact that we are given a Divine commentary on this prophecy. In Acts 15, when the brethren met to consider the Gentiles standing with God and concerning the church, James quoted that passage from Amos 9. James not only quoted this Scripture, he applied it to the inclusion of the Gentiles—which was in God's plan all along. James called for their attention, and then said:

And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men

might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things (Acts 15:13-17).

David's house would not be destroyed, because it was an integral part of God's Messianic plan. God's unwillingness to destroy David's house (as He had Israel) was for this very reason.

Now, we come to the main focus of this lesson, i.e., that which is said concerning the light. Thus, let us focus our attention on what is said concerning the "light."

### **GOD PROMISED TO GIVE HIM A LIGHT ALWAYS**

One of the prominent images in Scripture is light. In God's Word, the Bible, light emerges as one of its major and most complex symbols. We are introduced to light early in Scripture. In Genesis 1:3 we read: "And God said, Let there be light: and there was light." At the close of God's revelation to man, a magnificent promise is made: "And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 22:5).

In Scripture, we note a conflict between light and darkness. In Genesis 1:4, light and darkness are separated (v. 4). Yet, in verse 16 we see light has the properties of rulership—"God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also." Even in the Exodus light is significant. In the midst of the plagues, we see the Egyptians' plight compared to the Israelites. "They (the Egyptians, DWW) saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days: but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings" (Ex. 10:23). Later, in the wilderness, light stands out in a great role. Exodus 13:21 says: "And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night." Here, it should be noted that light was not self-generated. It came forth from Jehovah, Who is light (1 Jn. 1:5). In both of the above Exodus passages, light indicates God's presence and His provision of leadership and safety.

In the Lord's promise concerning David, in the passages under consideration for our study, "a light" is mentioned. Jehovah promised "a light ... forever" (2 Chr. 21:7) and "always" (2 Kgs. 8:19; 1 Kgs.

11:36). We dare not let the simplicity of these passages overshadow the brilliance of their imagery.

Beginning with the direct impact of the imagery, we must consider that when a lamp was shining in a dwelling place, it indicated occupancy. Spoken of David and his sons, we are reminded that there would always be a descendant of David over at least one of the tribes—namely, the tribe of Judah.

In the Northern Kingdom of Israel, made up of the ten tribes, there were nineteen kings, all of whom were bad. Of those nineteen kings, there were nine dynasties or nine different families represented in ruling over Israel. In the Southern Kingdom of Judah, made up of the two tribes, there were nineteen kings; however, they all represented one dynasty. That dynasty was made of David's family or seed. In this sense, there would be a "light" always in the house of David.

#### **FELLOWSHIP AND THE LIGHT**

As we expand the imagery of "light" as mentioned in association with Judah, we must consider the "fellowship" issues that are associated with that imagery. In 1 John 1:5-7, this link is obvious. There John states:

This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

Again, in consideration of our passages, and particularly their introducing the imagery of "light," we must, at the very least, be reminded that David's seed would have fellowship with God. This fellowship would be in God's redemptive plan. Amos rhetorically asked: "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). Judah would not always be in agreement of God. Though their captivity would be delayed (compared to that of Israel), it was not because they were more righteous and maintained holiness. With the exceptions of a handful of good kings, Judah was just as wicked as Israel, her northern counterpart. However, Jehovah had made a promise to Abraham and to David. Messiah would come from their descendants. In this way, in the working of His redemptive plan, Judah would maintain a tie to

Jehovah. “Light,” as mentioned in this context, thus reminds us of this fellowship.

### THE CHURCH AND THE LIGHT

Developing the imagery of light, we are again reminded of the Lord’s church. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reminded us that His disciples must let their “light[s] so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Mt. 5:16). Though this has an indirect association to the church, we do not have to stretch the imagery. In Colossians 1:12-13, we find a passage that directly associates the church with light. Paul penned:

Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.

Notice how those who had been translated “*into the kingdom of his dear Son*” are the “partakers of the inheritance of the saints *in light.*” When John the immerser was making straight the way of the Lord, he was preparing the way for “the dayspring from on high hath visited us, To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Lk. 1:78-79). In this way, Jesus can legitimately be referred to as “the light of the world,” Who, if followed, will take men out of darkness and give them the “light of life” (Jn. 8:12).

These promises and this thought of light are for those who are “in Christ Jesus,” which is equivalent to being in His church. Before continuing in another line of thought, it should be mentioned again that this applies not only to Judah and the Jews, but also to the Gentiles. Earlier, we considered Amos 9:11-12, where the breaches of the tabernacle of David were to be restored, and we showed how James, in Acts 15, gave us a divine commentary on this prophecy. There, he tied that prophecy directly to the entrance of the Gentiles into the church. The light would not be exclusively for Judah and David, but it would be brought through the “Seed of David,” who is the “Root of David” (Rev. 5:5), or even “the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David” (Jer. 33:15; Zech. 3:8; 6:12).

### THE REWARD AND THE LIGHT

Finally, we will notice how the “light” is also associated with our final reward. In the last two chapters of Revelation, we see a number of

references made to "light." In studying this section of the book, we learn that all of the enemies of the Lamb have been conquered and removed. It is a splendid view of the redeemed and the reward that Jehovah bestows upon them for their faithfulness. In Revelation 21:10-11, John is given a view of "that great city, the holy Jerusalem." Reporting on what he saw, John relates:

And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.

The magnificence of the light as set in that city stirs our thoughts and our anticipation of such glorious beauty. Again, the imagery of light is set forth in a regal position in Revelation 21:23-24. There, John says:

And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it.

What a glorious privilege light possesses as it is directly associated with the Lamb Who is worthy of praise. The last reference to light in the Book of Revelation is just as encouraging, relating: "And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 22:5). Surely, the light promised to continue in David's house has some reference to the final rest provided for the children of God.

### CONCLUSION

From the beginning of God's Word to its close, light plays a significant role in our understanding of Jehovah, His plan, His Son, and His redemptive scheme. Intertwined in this imagery is the king who was a man after God's own heart, David. We cannot contemplate the golden thread that courses the pages of Holy Writ without spending considerable time with that great man of God. Upon reflection of David's role in God's scheme and the complete redemptive work of Christ, we cannot help but be reminded that to the young gospel preacher, Timothy, Paul declared: "*And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the*

Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory” (1 Tim. 3:16, emphasis added). With such “great and precious promises” (2 Pet. 1:4) given, let us dwell in the light and continue therein as we all study our Bibles more.

**ENDNOTES**

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are taken from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> J.E. Smith, *The Major Prophets*, Isa. 36:1-20 (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1992), 108.

# “THOSE THAT REBEL AGAINST THE LIGHT”

*Tommy Stacks*



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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

From a study of the book of Job, we understand Satan’s attack against Job. We also see the foolishness of Job’s wife and his three friends. Job’s friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, repeatedly accuse him of having committed some great wrong—their explanation for his great loss and suffering. Job answers them each time they expound on how terrible he is. Eliphaz made his last of three speeches to Job in chapter 22, then we read Job’s answer in chapters 23 and 24. This brings us to our lesson’s text, where the term “light” is used: “They are of those that rebel against the light; they know not the ways thereof, nor abide in the paths thereof” (Job 24:13).

Throughout the Bible, “light” is used in the literal and figurative senses. It is no different in the book of Job, which uses the term “light” in 32 verses. In this study, we will only deal with its use in Job 24:13.

## “REBEL AGAINST THE LIGHT”

To understand the literal and/or figurative usage of the phrase, “rebel against the light,” it must be examined in the context of Job 24:13. It should be noted that some may think that to “rebel against the light” somehow “literally” has to do with sin committed in the dark hours so as not to be discovered by man. Thus, rebelling against the light or thinking that one’s sin is not known or seen because it was committed in the darkness. This would be attempting to hide one’s sin from the literal light of the day or thinking sin is not known if done in darkness. Eliphaz must have determined, in his way of thinking, that

Job committed some terrible sin under darkness. He did not know what Job's sin was, but he was sure he had committed some terrible sin—or else he would not have suffered the material, family, and physical losses he had.

You can also see the use of “light” in the figurative sense in Job 24:13. One cannot do anything specifically against the literal light, for the light of the day will shine regardless of how one may conduct his life during the darkness of the night.

Another way to see “light” in the figurative sense is to use it to mean “God's way.” His way is the way that lights our way to heaven. A person can rebel against the truth of God's Word, which figuratively speaking is “the light.” One cannot hide his sins from God as he might hide them from man. “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb 4:13). God sees all, even though man may think he is hiding something from Him.

#### **WICKEDNESS OF THOSE WHO “REBEL AGAINST THE LIGHT”**

Job begins his answer to Eliphaz in Job 23. Then, in Job 24:1, he refers to “they” as the wicked. He describes their wickedness in Job 24:2-12. They had removed the landmarks, taken from others, and would not help the needy. In Job 24:14-18, he speaks of the murderer in the light, who is a thief at night. He describes the adulterer who thinks no one will see him in the night. The wicked rob houses at night, which they had marked during the day. The wicked ones operate deceitfully and swiftly. Job 24:21-24 explains that those who “rebel against the light” do evil to the childless and that they are not good to the widow. The wicked one will use his power to keep people in fear. He will flatter others, then take advantage of them when he gains their trust.

I believe Job, in his last speech to Eliphaz, is letting him know that he understands how the wicked behave and how they “rebel against the light.” Job declares that he is not guilty of any of these things, letting his friends know that he is innocent. We know from Job 1 that God did not have anything against Job; therefore, Job was innocent (Job 1:8). This is not to say that just because one may think he is right that he is right. Our actions (or lack thereof) must be compared to God's Word to determine if they are right or not. God is the one who declared of Job

that he "was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil" (Job 1:1).

### **VARIOUS WAYS TO "REBEL AGAINST GOD'S WORD"**

How could any right thinking person rebel against the Word of God? To rebel against His Word is to rebel against Him. Hosea writes: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children" (Hos. 4:6). It is truly sad when one forgets or rebels against God. Many reject knowledge by failing to study God's Word and putting into practice those things learned. Paul instructs: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). The result of not studying God's Word, and putting the knowledge gained from it into practice, is to "rebel against the light" of God's Word; therefore, such is to commit sin. The Bible says: "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law" (1 Jn. 3:4). Today, one is without excuse if he fails to study God's Word and put into practice those things God wills for him to do. There is simply no excuse for anyone not to reach heaven. In His Word, God provides us with all we need to know to be with Him in eternity, and we have no excuse if we fail to obey Him so that we can.

#### *Rebellion*

Adam and Eve were the first humans to rebel against God (Gen. 3:6). Since that time, men have continued to rebel against Him in every way imaginable to them. Though sin is not inherited, as the Calvinists teach, it can be said that Cain followed the way of his parents. Because "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23), it is correct to say that the free moral agency of every man in every generation has not prevented him from rebelling and sinning against God. To point out the many and various ways man has rebelled against God would be an unending task. A few will be briefly considered here.

#### *Failure To Trust In God*

The children of Israel openly and consistently rebelled against God. When God freed them from their Egyptian bondage, they wanted to go back to Egypt and back into slavery (Ex. 14:11-12; 16:2-3). Frank Chesser states: "The Israelites expressed their preference for death as

a slave under Pharaoh as opposed to life as a free man under God.”<sup>2</sup> Today, many prefer to stay (or, as in the case of many Christians, go back) under bondage to sin rather than enjoy the freedom from sin that God offers to those who will trust and obey Him. The Israelites wandered in the wilderness for forty years because they did not trust in God. They chose to believe the ten spies which were sent to spy out the Promised Land, rather than to believe Joshua and Caleb who were ready to obey God and take the land He had promised them. A lack of trust in the God of heaven is one way man can rebel against God. It has been said by many, and in many cases proved time and again, that one sin almost always leads to other sins—it was certainly no different with the Israelites.

#### *Murmuring And Complaining*

The sin of failing to trust in God led the Israelites to murmur and complain against God’s leader Moses (Num. 11), with his own brother and sister, Aaron and Miriam, leading the way. Today, too many Christians are murmuring and complaining when they ought to be using their abilities to further the cause of Christ. A busy person does not have time to complain, for he is too busy being a doer of the word (Jas. 1:22). Some seem to find fault with everyone and everything, but fail to realize the problem may very well be themselves. Many say the church is not growing because of the elders, the preacher, the deacons, and others, but they never include themselves as being responsible for a lack of growth. One of the hippie-types back in the 1960s gave a lot of speeches about what was wrong with “the establishment,” murmuring and complaining about everyone and everything. Then, one day, he said he realized it was not everyone and everything else who “stunk,” but it was he. Oh, how so many of us need a lot of self-examination today (2 Cor. 13:5)!

#### *Deception*

When the children of Israel took the city of Jericho they were not allowed to keep any of the spoils (Josh. 6:18-19). However, as soon as the children of Israel crossed the Jordan River and took the city of Jericho, Achan decided he would violate this direct command of God. He took of the spoils and hid them in his tent (Josh. 7:21). How many Christians today think they are hiding their sins from God? “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do”

(Heb. 4:13). We may be able to deceive one another, but it is impossible to deceive God. We read: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7). Achan reaped what he sowed and so will those living under the Christian dispensation who engage in the sin of deception.

#### *Worldliness*

For approximately 450 years after the death of Joshua, God raised up judges to rule Israel (Acts 13:20). God's people grew weary of having a judge over them and they said to Samuel: "Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations" (1 Sam 8:5). Can you imagine them saying: "We want to be like those round about us, we do not want to be different?" God instructed Samuel to let the people have what they wanted. In giving the people their desired king, Samuel declared:

Now therefore behold the king whom ye have chosen, and whom ye have desired! and, behold, the Lord hath set a king over you. If ye will fear the Lord, and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you continue following the Lord your God: But if ye will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then shall the hand of the Lord be against you, as it was against your fathers (1 Sam. 12:13-15).

There are many Christians today who are like those Israelites who wanted to be like the nations around them. Often Christians are seen dressing, acting, and going to questionable places simply because they want to be like those of the world. Many congregations have removed the name of the church from their buildings and signs because they are ashamed to promote the one true church. We hear of contemporary worship services conducted in order to please the worldly minded. In this so-called "worship," where mechanical instruments of music are sometimes used, the worldly minded church members are simply trying to be like those round about them. It matters not to them that such is rebellion against the light of God's Word. The leadership in such congregations is composed of menpleasers (Eph. 6:6; Col. 3:22) who want to be pleasing to everyone. Therefore, they cater to the worldly-minded, forgetting that their first obligation is to please God.

Formerly faithful congregations of the Lord's people in many places are now following the denominations' lead with their praise

teams, the use of instrumental music in their worship, house-churches, and the worldly “anything goes” entertainment mind-set. Opposing such digression, Louis Rushmore stresses: “The worship practices of the churches of Christ, then, are not intended to be *different*, but to be identical to what God through the New Testament requires”<sup>3</sup> If Christians follow the pattern given in the New Testament we will be different from the world. Our intentions must be to do exactly what God desires of us, not to be like the denominations around us. Let none of us “rebel against the light” and engage in the sin of worldliness, which includes the practices of the worldly religions. Our Lord and Saviour never intended for Christians to be like the world.

### *Self-willed*

When Saul became king of Israel he soon revealed his true self. To Saul, Samuel said: “Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass” (1 Sam. 15:3). Upon defeating the Amalekites, Saul decided to spare king Agag and keep the best of the livestock. It is recorded:

And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly (1 Sam. 15:8-9).

No doubt, Saul was pleased with his response to Samuel—“Blessed be thou of the Lord: I have performed the commandment of the Lord” (1 Sam. 15:13). He did not fool Samuel. Samuel knew better. Convicting Saul of his disobedience, Samuel rebuked:

What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear? ... Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king (1 Sam. 15:14, 22-23).

King Saul is an excellent example of one who is self-willed, doing things the way he wanted them to be done—even if it meant disobeying God. We cannot live by the philosophy of the hamburger ad: “Have it

your way," or by the song "I Did It My Way." A Scripturally qualified elder is "not self-willed" (Tit. 1:7), but neither is any other "Scripturally qualified" New Testament Christian (Phil. 2:1-5).

Saul's wanting to do things his way reminds us of Naaman. At first, Naaman was not pleased with the prophet's instructions to go to the Jordan River and dip seven times to be cleansed of his leprosy. Instead, Naaman thought his way would be alright. His words, "behold, I thought" (2 Kgs. 5:11), shows that his thinking was not God's thinking. Fortunately for Naaman, he did obey God and was cleansed of his leprosy. My prayer is that not one of us will be self-willed, rebelling against the "light."

It is truly sad today when so many are so self-willed that they will ignore or seek to change what the Scriptures say. On numerous occasions, when something unscriptural is preached or practiced, brethren are heard to say: "It doesn't bother me." What they mean by saying that is: "If it does not bother me, then it is all right!" This is a clear-cut attitude of self-will. Yes, too many Christians today are like those Israelites of old, however, the Bible still says: "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise" (Pro. 12:15).

Diotrephes, desiring preeminence, insisted on having his way (3 Jn. 9). He thought of himself as being "numero uno," "the big kahuna." The attitude of modern-day Diotrepheses—"I am right, there is no possible way I could be wrong, we are going to do things my way"—has divided, and is dividing, brethren across our great brotherhood. Let us learn the lesson that Saul failed to learn, we must not be self-willed. He thought his way was right, but it was not what God wanted. In order to please God, we must be willing to deny self (Mt. 16:24). To be self-willed is to "rebel against the light."

### *Stubbornness*

There are many lessons to be learned from Jonah. Yet, I do not recall ever hearing a lesson dealing with his stubbornness. Imagine being told to go to the city of Nineveh and preach, but refusing to go. The account begins:

Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the

fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord (Jon. 1:1-3).

The Lord got the last word in dealing with Jonah's stubbornness. He "prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah" (Jon. 1:17a).

It is sad to think that a preacher would refuse to go preach what God commanded him to preach to any city, evil and atrocious as its people may be. Unfortunately, today there are many preachers and church members who are as stubborn as Jonah. There are numerous uncertain sounds—things which cannot be found in the Scriptures—coming from so-called "preachers." Churches are being flooded with "feel good" lessons, instead of God's saving message proclaimed with boldness and love. Many Gospel preachers stubbornly refuse to "speak as the oracles of God" (1 Pet. 4:11). Paul told the elders of Ephesus: "I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). Contrary to Paul's example, some nowadays do not feel this is the thing to do. They think it might cost them their job, or possibly run someone off, or hurt someone's feelings, or step on someone's toes, etc. They stubbornly refuse to say what needs to be said. In so doing, they "rebel against the light" of God's Word. It is indeed sad when a man will not speak *all* of God's truths! Just think of the millions of souls which have been lost, and of those which will be lost, as the result of those who stubbornly fail to declare God's saving message—*the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth*. May none of us ever have that kind of stubborn attitude.

#### *Apostasy*

The Israelites continually drifted away from God. Then, in trouble with nowhere else to turn, they would seemingly have a change of heart and return to God. Instead of learning from their mistakes and getting stronger, they allowed their sins to return and they left God over and over again. This eventually led to an apostasy from which, as a nation, they would not return. Many times we have heard of those who take "one step forward and two steps backward." That describes how Israel responded with sin.

Amos 8:1-2 says:

Thus hath the Lord God shewed unto me: and behold a basket of summer fruit. And he said, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A basket of summer fruit. Then said the Lord unto me, The end

is come upon my people of Israel; I will not again pass by them any more.

It is tragically sad when one goes into apostasy. I do not understand how any individual, or a nation such as Israel, could turn against God. Israel came to the end of the road insofar as God's patience and goodness were concerned. After that, they have had to reap what they had sown.

Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, constantly warned God's people not to turn away from God and exhorted them to return to Him. He did everything he could to get them to return to the "old paths." Jeremiah proclaimed:

Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein. Also I set watchmen over you, saying, Hearken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken. Therefore hear, ye nations, and know, O congregation, what is among them. Hear, O earth: behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but rejected it (Jer. 6:16-19).

What a rejection of God and His law! Twice in the above passage, Jeremiah pleaded for them to return, but they would not hearken.

Many preachers can tell of the heart-breaking situations with which they have had to deal. Preachers have pleaded with brethren to be faithful to God in their attendance to all services and by being involved to the fullest extent in the work of the Lord, but the brethren would not hearken. Later in their lives, some of those same brethren with which the preachers have pleaded, finally decide to make their way back to God. However, by that time, they have lost their spouse and/or their children to the devil. It is never a good time to forsake the Lord and His law. Israel paid the price and those who forsake Him today can expect the same. "For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6:8).

Every Christian should give and do his best when it comes to the cause of Christ. If we do not, then we place our soul in jeopardy. Lack of commitment and half-hearted, nominal service to God is one of the chief factors which leads to apostasy. Paul was giving instructions to

the brethren at Corinth concerning their giving, but in those instructions he stated a principal that is true in all that we do. He taught:

He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:6-7).

May each of us sow bountifully our time, our energy, our money, and in all that we do in our service to our Master.

### *Robbing God*

Christians need to regularly read the book of Malachi to see how far God's people drifted away from Him and acted as if they had done nothing wrong. Malachi 3:7-9 says:

Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return? Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.

The people offered polluted bread, impure sacrifices, the priests were corrupt, they put away the wives of their youth, robbed God in tithes and offerings, and said it was not to their benefit to serve God.

### *Rejecting The Saviour*

God had a plan for redeeming man before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). When He sent His Son to save man, Jesus was rejected and crucified on the cross by those He came to save (cf. Mt. 26-27; Mk. 15; Lk. 23; Jn. 19). It is sad to think that most of the people in the world have rejected the Saviour. Jesus said few would follow the strait and narrow way and that many would follow the broad and wide way (Mt. 7:13-14). Our Saviour loves us dearly and His desire is that each of us will serve Him faithfully and never reject Him.

### *Lying*

Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Ghost. Luke writes:  
But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to

lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God (Acts 5:1-4).

Many lie to God in the same way. To their brethren they want to appear right before God, but they know better. On the surface many seem to be living and serving God as they should, but their hearts are "not right in the sight of God," as was the case with Simon the sorcerer in Acts 8:21. One might lie to his fellow man and be hypocritical in his manner of living, but he cannot lie to, or hide his life from, God and escape His wrath.

#### *Fighting Against God*

Saul of Tarsus is probably the best example of an individual fighting against God. He persecuted Christians, delivered them to prisons, breathed out threatenings and slaughter, consented unto the death of Stephen, and took men and women bound unto Jerusalem (cf. Acts 7-9).

There are those today who fight against God. Religious division is fighting against our Lord's prayer in John 17. When one adds to the Word or subtracts from it, he is fighting against God (Rev. 22:18-19). When one knows to do good and does it not, he is fighting against God (Jas. 4:17). When one hears the Word and fails to obey, he is fighting against God (Mt. 7:24-27). When one who has obeyed the Gospel turns and goes back into the world, he is fighting against God (2 Pet. 2:20-22). When anyone preaches a perverted gospel, he is fighting against God (Gal. 1:6-9). These are but a few examples of how men can, and do rebel against the light and fight against God.

### **MANY HAVE OPENLY REBELLED AGAINST THE LIGHT**

Again, when Jeremiah pleaded with the people to hearken to the Word of the Lord, they openly rebelled and said: "We will not" (Jer. 6:16). They had gone about as far away from God as possible. Man has not changed. He is the same and he continues to openly rebel against God. Since the beginning man has yielded to temptation and sinned as a result of "the lust of the flesh ... the lust of the eyes" and/or "the pride of life" (1 Jn. 2:15-17).

God told Adam and Eve not to partake of the fruit of only one tree. “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:16-17). According to Genesis 3:6, Eve yielded to sin when she “saw that the tree was good for food” (lust of the flesh), “pleasant to the eyes” (lust of the eyes), “and a tree to be desired to make one wise” (the pride of life). When they ate the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve were openly rebelling against the light.

Only eight people were saved on the ark, therefore, we must conclude that the rest of the world rebelled against the light. The people at Babel wanted to make a name for themselves, therefore, we must conclude that they rebelled against the light. They wanted recognition instead of giving it to God.

God promised Abraham: “I will make of thee a great nation” (Gen. 12:2). Not content to leave the fulfillment of that promise in God’s hands, Abraham and Sarah tried to help Him. As a result, Sarah gave her handmaid, Hagar, to Abraham. Hagar bare Abraham a son, Ishmael. In all of this, Abraham and Sarah were openly rebelling against the light by not trusting in God. Not only did their rebellion bring heart-aches to Abraham and Sarah, the tragic ramifications of their actions continues to bring sorrow today.

In Genesis 25, Esau sold his birthright to his brother, Jacob. Later, Jacob received the blessing from his father, Isaac (Gen. 27:30; 28:1). This motivated Esau to go against his father and marry the daughters of Canaan and the daughter of Ishmael, (Gen. 28:8-9). Esau openly rebelled against the light by taking wives which his father had forbidden.

The Israelites constantly rebelled against the light during the 40 years they were in the wilderness. When God gave them the Promised Land, they failed to be content and seemed to continually be finding fault with something. God set judges over the people, but they wanted a king like those round about them. Saul, the first king, disobeyed God (1 Sam. 15) and rebelled against the light. David, the second king of Israel, committed adultery with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11) and rebelled against the light. Solomon, the last king to serve in the united kingdom, took unto him strange wives (1 Kgs. 11), which turned him from God to idols, thus, he rebelled against the light. Following Solomon’s reign,

the kingdom of Israel divided because the leadership and the people rebelled against the light.

The Bible always tells us the good and the bad, which distinguishes it from most other books. When one takes the entire Bible he can see that God has always sought for man that which is best for man. It is sad to read of the wayward Israelites and their chronic warring against the light of God's Word—especially when God had been so good to them. However, the Israelites' rebellion against Him did not keep God from loving them. God sent His Son to this earth to "save his people from their sins" (Mt. 1:21).

### **TO REJECT GOD'S WORD IS TO REJECT GOD, CHRIST, AND SALVATION**

Christians know that salvation is not possible if we reject God's Word. We have read and quoted passages throughout the Bible which show that the final outcome of rejecting God's Word is not good. Jesus made it very plain that each one will be judged by the written word. He declared:

He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak (Jn. 12:48-50).

Notice that Jesus said He was speaking the commandments of God. In this study we have demonstrated with a variety of cases that throughout time many have rejected God's Word. It should be noted that in those cases, it is God Who is being rejected, not the messenger.

Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to guide the apostles into all truth. He told them: "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come" (Jn. 16:13). Therefore, when one rejects God's Word, he rejects God and the Holy Spirit.

Jesus extends His loving invitation for all to come unto Him and have rest. He beckons: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your

souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Mt. 11:28-30). It is plain to see that if one refuses to accept Jesus’ invitation, then he rejects Jesus.

After hearing the preaching of the apostles on Pentecost, the people asked: “[W]hat shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). About 3,000 responded to God’s Word that day by being baptized (Acts 2:38-41), and the Lord added them to His church (Acts 2:47).

Jesus talked of the wise man and the foolish man in Matthew 7:24-27. The wise man hears what God’s Word says and does it. On the other hand, the foolish man hears God’s Word but fails to do what it says. Hearing and heeding God’s Word, the wise man’s house remains safely standing. Hearing but not heeding God’s Word, the foolish man’s house falls—it is lost. Christ’s point is obvious. Those who do not heed (obey) God’s Word will fall, i.e., be eternally lost.

Man’s record, along with the books of God’s righteous standard, will be opened in the Judgment. Discussing the Judgment scene revealed to him, John relates:

And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire (Rev 20:12-15).

When one rejects God’s Word, he not only rejects that Word, he rejects God, he rejects Christ, he rejects the Holy Spirit, and *he rejects his own salvation*. Each person must obey God’s Word to be saved. After that, one must continue to obey God’s Word in order to remain faithful. This is necessary in order to reach heaven. May none of us be guilty of rebelling against the light.

### CONCLUSION

Many down through the ages have rebelled against the light. Today, many continue to do the same. It is sad that some brethren seek to change God’s Word to accommodate their desires and sins. Peter says those who do so “are unlearned and unstable” and that they “wrest ... the ... scriptures, unto their own destruction” (2 Pet. 3:16).

In Noah’s day, except for Noah and his family (eight souls), God destroyed all human life on the earth with a worldwide flood. Why? It was because of the degree to which sin had so permeated the men then living. Moses explains:

And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them (Gen. 6:5-7).

One day—and we do not know when that day will be—God will destroy this earth and all that is in it (2 Pet. 3:10-12). Judgment day will be a reality. The obedient ones will be in Heaven with God for eternity. The unrighteous ones will be in hell, separated from God for eternity.

It is my prayer that we are not among those who “rebel against the light.” Further, it is my prayer that those who do “rebel against the light” will repent and turn back to God and His Word. Obedience to God and His Word is the only hope of salvation (i.e., eternity with God in heaven) that we have.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are taken from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> Frank Chesser, *Portrait of God* (Huntsville, AL: Publishing Designs Inc. 2004), 65.

<sup>3</sup> Louis Rushmore, *The Church Divine* (Winona, MS: published by author, 2006), 27-28.

# “LEST THE LIGHT ... SHOULD SHINE UNTO THEM”

*Wayne Jones*



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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Walk in the light. What a wonderful and oft abused concept. For many, walking in the light is the equivalent to the heresy of “once saved, always saved.” They would contend that anything done under the banner of honesty, and with the right “spirit,” constitutes walking in the light. Consequently, their thinking is that even if the practice itself is sinful and unauthorized, the blood of Christ will cover it because I am *walking in the light*. Such attitudes leave the door open for any and all manner of additions and subtractions to what God has declared. Such a view is *not* what John intended when he penned the words of 1 John 1:7-9.

On the other hand, some have confined walking in the light to a seemingly impossible task that is doomed for failure no matter how faithful the one tries to be. For far too many, walking in the light is similar to walking a tight rope. They have been conditioned to believe that one misstep and they are once again consumed in darkness. Fearfully, like the one talent man of Matthew 25, those who hold this view of Christianity will become discouraged with their own imperfections and assume that God is angry with them all the time.

We are indebted to brother Hicks and the elders of the Southside congregation for their decision to look deeply into this misunderstood topic. It is our prayer that faithful Christians the world over will benefit from this study and that those walking in darkness will not have the light hidden from them, but that they might come to know the Light of the world Who can and will take away their sins.

Our assignment comes from a phrase found in 2 Corinthians 4:4 which pertains to the plight of some who need the light of the Gospel, but for one or more reasons they are unable to see it. What a terrible thought! The Scriptures often use the concepts of light and darkness to contrast a life lived in sin to a life lived in fellowship with God. It is in the light where forgiveness is found (1 Jn. 1:7-9). Light is the residing place for all who have been translated in the kingdom of God (Col. 1:12-15). Spiritual light is the source of life and immortality (2 Tim. 1:10). Conversely, darkness represents no forgiveness, no divine fellowship, and no eternal life. To fail to see the light is to fail miserably. A man may go through life and never see the beauty of a West Texas sunset or the snow-capped Rocky Mountains, but a man who fails to see the beauty of God in the Light of His Word has failed to see the most important thing in life.

In order that we might effectively cover the various aspects of this text and its ramifications in our lives, we will divide our study into three different sections. First, we will consider the backdrop to the text assigned. Once we have adequately set the stage, we will consider the *villain* and the *veil*, which are discussed in 2 Corinthians 4:4.

### THE BACKDROP TO OUR TEXT

Change is difficult for most people. Even if a habit or custom has only been practiced for a few months, breaking it and replacing it with something else can seem nearly impossible. When it came time for a "change of the law" (Heb. 7:12), the difficulty was evident. While we might be quick to look disparagingly on the people of the Jewish nation for their unwillingness to simply let go of the past and move forward into the "perfect law of liberty" (Jas. 1:25), we should stop to take stock of what they were giving up, and the great difficulty this change would bring to their lives. From the time of the exodus through the period of the judges to the exile and the return, Jewish life had centered upon the ceremony, rites, and observances of the old law. Their entire social and economic structure was based on the various allowances and prohibitions detailed in the law. Their calendars, travel plans, and "vacation" times were an outgrowth of the Mosaic system. Generation after generation had (in some form or another) ascribed to this law and, especially since the time of the restoration, the law had taken supreme importance in the lives of Jewish leaders.

Suddenly, a carpenter's son from lowly Nazareth came claiming to be the fulfillment of that law. Also, He appeared to know more about this law than anyone else. Unlearned and uneducated in the eyes of most, this self-proclaimed Messiah began to call for heartfelt conversion as opposed to ritualistic, mindless performance. He hinted at a new law, new worship places, and a new kingdom. All this would require drastic change from the old ways. What was the Jewish response? They resisted. They tried to find fault with Him. They tried to negate His teachings by catching Him in contradictions and by pitting Him against other religious instructors. They made Him out to be morally debased. Yet all of their accusations were without evidence or foundation. When all else failed they lied about Him, belittled Him, and killed Him. They did all this because of a stern and unyielding opposition to change.

The relentless attacks of the Pharisees toward Jesus' teaching and claims did not end with the cross. With their faith rejuvenated after the resurrection, Jesus' disciples began to fulfill their Master's last commission, i.e., to go into the world and teach His message to all men. They were sent to turn the world upside down and bring all men into the new kingdom through adherence to the new law. Early in their pursuits, they were warned, then beaten by the same people that had initially rejected the Christ (Acts 4:5-22; 5:17-40). Going forward from these events, there were numerous attempts by the Jewish leaders to stop the progress of Christianity. The antagonistic efforts of those attempting to stop the spread of the Gospel only led to more teaching in more places by more people (Acts 8:1ff). Those opposed to Christianity remained resistant to change, despite the thousands of honest hearts that accepted and obeyed the Gospel of Christ.

Even among those who believed in the deity of Christ, and who accepted the validity of the need for change, there were those who resisted complete change. Understanding the need for salvation in Christ, but still desperately clinging to the old law, many sought to combine the two systems. In doing so, they openly attacked the message of the Gospel. That message was that salvation comes only through Christ—not through the adherence to the old law. Despite the plain revelation that the Law of Moses had been abolished, the "Judaizers" plagued the first century church with their blend of Moses and Christ. Circumcision was an issue that these Jewish converts often centered on because it represented the true physical distinction between them and the Gentile world. Their rejection of the Gospel system of

faith without Jewish additions was based on a refusal to give up their claim as God’s “chosen people.” As a result, the books of Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews were written to emphasize the roles of Moses’ law and the nation of Israel in God’s plan to bring forth the Messiah, and to establish the supremacy of Christ’s law as the final authority.

Despite the relentless attacks on the doctrine of Christ, Christianity still spread like wildfire through the first century world. The response of the Judaizers was to attack the messenger along with the message. One of the chief messengers was the apostle Paul. His endorsement of Christianity—and his preaching that the old covenant had been abolished—was extremely detrimental to their cause. After all, Paul used to be one of them. He was not merely a Jew. Paul was “a Hebrew of the Hebrews” (Phil. 3:5), one who had trained at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). In line with the Judaizers’ thinking, if ever a preacher needed to be discredited, it had to be the one who had once persecuted the church and had done so because he sincerely wanted to keep God’s law and receive His blessings. There were attacks on Paul’s credibility, his morality, his sincerity, and his authority. Often, he had to give space in his letters to deal with his critics who apparently followed him from location to location in order to cause him harm and/or to negate his teachings. In matters such as this, Paul experienced many of the same things that Christ experienced while preaching and teaching about the kingdom.

In the opening chapters of 2 Corinthians, Paul defended himself and his teachings. His claim of sincerity (2 Cor. 2:17) was, no doubt, an answer to those who would unfoundedly accuse him of being less than sincere. Yet, once he claimed to be sincere, his critics would, no doubt, use this claim to label Paul as self-promoting and prideful. Thus, as 2 Corinthians 3 opens, Paul settles that question by asking two rhetorical questions. First, was it necessary for him to commend himself to the Corinthians? Second, did he need letters of recommendation so that the Corinthians would believe him? Letters of commendation were commonly circulated through the Graeco-Roman world.<sup>2</sup> Paul had carried similar letters implying authority while persecuting the early church (Acts 9:2). Yet, when it came to his preaching the Gospel of Christ, Paul did not need any such written endorsement. In reality, the Corinthians (and many others in the places where Paul had preached) had written Paul’s recommendation letter by their obedience to the Gospel and their acceptance of him as an apostle.

Once he had proved his rightful place as a trustworthy messenger of God, Paul set out to offer a defense of the message he delivered. He accomplished this goal through very vivid and beautiful language (cf. 2 Cor. 3:7-18). One main point of emphasis was the unshielded glory of the new covenant in contrast to the veiled glory of God in the old covenant. It is not that God was not glorious, but that man, except on rare occasions, was unable physically and metaphorically to see the fullness of God's glory. There was the time when Moses was in the presence of God. As a result, his face shone so bright that he wore a veil when addressing the people (Ex. 34:32-35). Likewise, the high priest was able to meet God at the mercy seat and dwell in His presence while making atonement for sins, but all of this happened behind the veil that physically separated the holy place from the holy of holies and representatively separated the people from their God and His full glory.

In contrast to the old law with its veiled glory (the very law that the Judaizing teachers were pressing the Christians at Corinth and other places to embrace), the new law could provide an unveiled relationship with God. Whereas the old law said, "Keep out" and "Do not enter," the new law said: "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace" (Heb. 4:16). Not only is there the opportunity to see it and to dwell in it, but the Christian can also partake in this glory. Paul sums up 2 Corinthians 3, saying: "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18).

Being a chosen spokesman for this message of hope and light, Paul made it clear that quitting was no option (2 Cor. 4:1). No matter how vicious the personal attacks became, he could not afford to give up or lose heart. This ministry—the ministry of writing on the hearts of men rather than stone tablets—was to Paul, the most rewarding and important ministry in the world. It was worth the disdain in which he was held and the manner in which he was so often treated.

Despite the depths and riches of the Gospel, and despite the clarity with which it was preached, to some the Gospel was still hidden or veiled. This is what Paul meant when he wrote: "But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them" (2 Cor. 4:3-4). By using a play on words, Paul contends that the Gospel

(that should have been easy to see due to the glorious nature of the God Who authored it) was actually still covered, veiled, or hidden to some. Therefore, by putting a veil over the Gospel, some were unable to benefit from the light that is produced. Where would that leave them but in the dark where there was shame, no forgiveness, and a veiled view of God?

How could that be? If Paul and others were traveling to distant lands and boldly proclaiming the Gospel message, and the fullness of God’s glory shone through that message, how could that Gospel remain hidden or veiled? The answer does not lie in the message or in the messenger, but in those who do not believe—and, in the effect “the god of this age” has had on their minds.

### THE VILLIAN

It seems clear that Paul’s reference to “the god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4) is a direct reference to Satan. Although some commentators, such as Adam Clarke, have vehemently opposed this view,<sup>3</sup> this writer contends that Satan is under consideration in this passage. If the Bible truly is its own best commentary, then passages within it, such as John 12:31 and Ephesians 2:2, settle the issue for us. In those passages, Satan is identified as “the ruler of this world” and the “prince of the power of the air,” respectively. We must be careful in our understanding of these descriptions. Otherwise, we may attribute more power to Satan than he has ever had and promote him to being on an “arch-enemy” par with God. In my opinion, the Bible does not teach that about Satan.

Satan possessed a certain measure of power over the first century world. During the wilderness encounter with Jesus, Satan took Jesus up to the mountain top and offered Him control over all the kingdoms of the earth (Mt. 4:8-10; Lk. 4:5-6). While some have suggested that Satan’s offer was bogus, and that he was merely living up to Christ’s description of him as the “father of lies,” this writer does not hold to that theory. A temptation is a temptation. If Satan could not deliver what he offered, and Christ knew it, then it could not be a temptation. In reality, what Satan was offering to Christ was a short cut around the cross. By bowing to the devil, Christ could gain a kingdom—like the one it was thought He came to set up. However, in keeping with Satan’s way, Jesus could avoid the cross and still obtain that kingdom.

The idea was wickedly brilliant, but thanks be to God that our Savior was strong and discerning enough to see the fallacy of the offer.

The real question for Bible students relative to this temptation pertains to how Satan had control over “all the kingdoms of the world” (Mt. 4:8). In turn, that question helps us in our consideration of 2 Corinthians 4:4 and like passages (cf. Eph. 2:2; Jn. 12:31). The answer is simple and directly related to the overall discussion of 2 Corinthians 4—Satan’s control was exercised in the hearts and minds of men. What Satan was offering to Christ, in this writer’s opinion, was access to the hearts and minds of the men and women he controlled. His offer was not for a military kingdom with a palace and a throne. His offer was to hand over control of the hearts of his subjects to Christ. By exchanging control of the hearts of men for the worship of Christ, Satan would not have been giving up rule in the lives of these people. If he were to rule over Christ, Satan would also continue to rule over the ones he had handed over to Christ.

Satan’s power as ruler, prince, and god of “this world” or “this age” needs to be given some serious thought. Unfortunately, these descriptions have led some to perceive Satan as God’s rival thus producing a relationship between God and the devil similar to those relationships between fictitious super heroes and their nemeses (i.e., Superman and Lex Luther, or Batman and the Joker). Yet, the Bible never describes their relationship in this fashion.

This writer believes Satan was once a faithful angel in the company of God’s hosts and only fell due to his pride and desire to be on an equality with God. Consequently, Satan’s power and movements have always been subject to divine judgment and, when necessary, limited by divine control. In this arrangement, Satan never really had a chance to defeat God. Whether he realized it or not, his victory was never possible. This might explain why Satan so quickly attacked God’s creation and so violently sought to overthrow the scheme of redemption. His inability to defeat God was somewhat pacified when he was able to deceive and manipulate those made in His image and created after His likeness. So with ruthless and reckless pursuit, Satan turned his attention to mankind and he has been extremely successful in his attacks.

Satan’s true desire and hatred for man is revealed and highlighted in Job 1-2. When all the extras—such as deception, temptation, and manipulation—were removed and Satan was allowed to directly attack

man, he showed his true proverbial colors. He took everything Job had and left him in misery. This, however, was not the way in which he was allowed to deal with man on a regular basis. The only other time and situation in which Satan was given freedom to harm men physically was during the age of demon possession. Demon possession is another unique circumstance that allowed Satan to harm and invade mankind physically. Obviously, the phenomenon of demon possession was permitted and utilized by God to prove Christ's mastery over the demonic world, and to illustrate His power over Satan. For a period of time Satan and those who followed him in the rebellion were given allowance to hurt mankind, and that was exactly what they did (Mt. 8:28; Lk. 8:27-29). With the exceptions of a very few special circumstances and situations, Satan's power and influence has been extremely limited, virtually non-existent without human accompaniment.

Sadly, some view Satan as God's nemesis and ascribe to him as much power (in the wicked sense) as they do to God (in the righteous sense). "There is no religious dualism taught in the Bible."<sup>4</sup> Satan's rule was and is in the hearts of men because they "let him in" by means of teaching and influence. Satan's role as "prince" is linked to a spirit of disobedience that he fathered in the rebellion. Satan's mastery is a reference to demon possession, the national and religious wickedness that permeated most aspects of first century society, or a combination of the two. The devil is referred to as "god," not in terms of the authority he possesses, but in respect to the position he and his philosophy earned in the hearts of many in the world. "The devil is referred to as 'god' in the Bible because some people have been seduced by him" in their minds, not controlled by him in their actions.<sup>5</sup> Satan is the ruler and leader in religious rebellion due to his being the first to attempt a divine coup, and due to his persistent attacks in turning the minds of men away from the truth of God.

Satan has been, presently is, and forever will be subject to the authority and rule of God. His rule and dominion is limited. As a result, man has no Scriptural foundation for attributing his mistakes and missteps to Satan and his power. Man is tempted when he is lured away through his own lustful desires and enticed by the pleasures and pursuits of this world (Jas. 1:13-15). Some go so far in involving Satan in this process that they say: "He knows our minds, our weakness, and our struggles and uses them against us." In this writer's opinion, ascribing that type of power to Satan is not supported by the Bible. If

all temptation is a result of Satan's personal involvement, or if our toughest temptations are a result of Satan's firsthand knowledge of our thoughts, then he would need to be everywhere (or at least at a multiplicity of locations) simultaneously, and he would need to look into the hearts of men just like God does. Such abilities would necessarily attribute to the devil the Divine powers of omnipresence and omniscience. No matter what our opinion or understanding of Satan is, we must be very careful to avoid crediting him with these kinds of power.

"The god of this age" was *and is* responsible for the blinding of the hearts of the unbelievers by virtue of false teachings, and some men's susceptibility to be deceived (2 Thess. 2:9-11). The battle that has been waged between God's creation and the "prince of the power of the air" is a battle for the mind. Thus, we are instructed to take extra caution with what we put into our minds (Mt. 15:18-19). We are encouraged to guard our minds (Phil. 4:7), renew our minds (Rom. 12:2), and fill our minds with that which will produce faith (Rom. 10:17). We, therefore, become our own enemy when we refuse to seek and accept the Truth.

### THE VEIL

We have now established that Gospel is hidden to the minds of those who do not believe, due either to a lack of true knowledge or an infusion of false teaching. Now, let us identify some of those teachings or philosophies that blind the minds of some and veil them from the true glory of God.

#### *Christianity Mixed With Judaism*

Christianity mixed with Judaism is the specific false teaching under consideration in the context of 2 Corinthians 4. As previously noted, rather than leaving the Mosaic system completely, or rejecting every tenant of Christianity, many first century Jews attempted to compromise. The result was a man-made religion that had the same effect on the spiritual health of men as atheism or polytheism. Partial compromise results in complete blindness. The so-called "Jerusalem Council" concluded that circumcision and Old Testament law keeping were to have no place in the new covenant (Acts 15:24-25). While men were at liberty to privately observe certain physical elements of the old law, as long they did not violate the laws of God under the Christian Age, they were not allowed to bind those observances on anyone else (see Rom. 14 and 1 Cor. 8). A return to Judaism and its practices after having

obeyed the Gospel of Christ was described as a return to slavery (Gal. 5:1), and declared to be an abandonment of the true way to the Father (Heb. 10:26). Despite these warnings, many in the first century were unable to fully see and appreciate the glory of God in the new covenant because their eyes were dimmed by an unhealthy and unbiblical attachment to the Law of Moses. In this fashion their spiritual eyes (i.e., their minds) had been blinded.

#### *A Rejection Of Christ's Deity*

Satan also worked to blind the minds of men through the teaching that Jesus Christ was not the Son of the living God. Many of those who held this opinion of Jesus were associated with the Gnostic movement. It has long been believed that John was inspired to write his Gospel account and 1 John to answer the Gnostic heresy. John identified those who opposed the deity of Christ as “antichrists” (1 Jn. 2:18, 22). These “antichrists” (plural) were not one specific person to come toward the end of time (as supposed by the premillennialists), but the term was descriptive of anyone who denied that Jesus came as God in the flesh. For this reason, John wrote that the Word, who was God in the beginning, came in the flesh (Jn. 1:1, 14). It is also why John wrote about having seen Jesus with his eyes and having touched Him with his hands (1 Jn. 1:1). It was John’s desire that men not be blinded by the unsubstantiated rumors about Christ. Rather, he wanted all men to “believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing” all might have life in His name (Jn. 20:31).

Satan’s true intention was to blind men from the very fact that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. The one who has faith in the person and power of Christ will be privileged to see the light of God’s glory in its fullest (2 Cor. 4:4). If a man refuses to believe that Jesus is the Son of God (no matter if that refusal comes from his own misunderstanding or from being misled by someone else), then “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” will not shine upon him. No light means no forgiveness and no fellowship, which, in turn, means no salvation from sin for man and no glory for God. In that sense, Satan scores a “double victory” when one refuses to recognize and appreciate Christ for who He really is.

#### *Elevation Of Human Reasoning*

What better way to veil man from the Truth of the Gospel and from the brightness of God’s glory than to allow him to believe that he is

smart enough to “direct his own steps” (Jer. 10:23). Every generation has needed to discard this veil. God has blessed man with intellect, reason, and education. Medical discoveries, space exploration, and findings in nature are all made possible through God’s blessings to man, not through sheer human accomplishments. Man has always been, and will forever continue to be, dependent upon God. Attitudes that reflect otherwise simply veil the minds of men from knowing and accepting the Truth.

The mess seen in the religious world that surrounds us in modern-day America exemplifies this danger. Why are there differing denominational churches found virtually on every corner? Why are their various doctrines taught despite the clarity and unity of Scripture? Why do the phrases, “I just feel,” or, “it seems to me,” come up in almost every religious discussion instead of what the Bible says? Why do men tell stories about angels visiting them with new “revelations,” which contradict “the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Ju. 3)? The answers to all of these questions are found in the self-elevation of human opinion.

There is no way for a man, any man, to know what God wants for him unless God first reveals it. Once it has been revealed, there is no way man can improve upon it. To help prevent our minds from being blinded to the Truth of the Gospel and the full glory of God, may we learn *not* to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think (Rom. 12:3). Moreover, may we learn that man is not wise or knowledgeable enough to direct his own steps (Jer. 10:23).

#### *Pursuit Of Fleshly Desires*

It is not likely that a man would start down a path of worldly desire with the belief that such a path would make him spiritually complete. Therefore, this veil of the mind is not approached in the same manner as those previously mentioned. The veils of Judaism mixed with Christianity, Gnosticism, or human opinion can be placed upon the heart and mind of man under the guise of “religion.” Worldly pleasures, however, are different. When most start their pursuit of fulfilling the desires of the flesh without regard for God’s Word, they do so understanding the distinct contrast between their personal choices and the divine expectations of God for their lives. Yet, the longer they pursue those desires, the more easily they begin to justify their own actions. They begin to convince themselves that what they are doing is

acceptable. Eventually, they refuse to remember or acknowledge God in their hearts (Rom. 1:28), which, in turn, allows them to practice “sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness ... undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful” (Rom. 1:29-31), freedom from guilt or moral qualms.

### CONCLUSION

If we are naïve enough to believe that such attitudes cannot be developed by people in our current society, including some in the Lord’s church, then we are sadly and dangerously mistaken. The veil of self-indulgence and fleshly lusts may be the most prominent covering of our generation. Christ came into the world that we might have light, and through that light that all things could be exposed (Eph. 5:13). May we hold up Christ as the true Light. Doing that, we will ensure that no spiritual veil will block us from seeing the light of God. Furthermore, by holding up that Light (Christ), we will help men to remove the veils the “god of this age” has placed over their hearts.

Thanks be to God “the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light” (Col. 1:12).

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are taken from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> Melvin Curry, “The Book of 2 Corinthians” *Truth Commentaries* ed. Mike Williams (Bowling Green, KY: Gospel of Truth Commentaries, n.d.), 125.

<sup>3</sup> *Adam Clarke’s Commentary On The Bible*, electronic version (E-sword).

<sup>4</sup> Paul T. Bulter, “Second Corinthians.” *Bible Study Textbook Series* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 1988), 95.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

# “DELIVERED ... FROM THE POWER OF DARKNESS”

*Clay Bond*



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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

David said: “It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High” (Ps. 92:1). We are called upon to be thankful in everything, “for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thess. 5:18). Every person in this world, even the atheist, benefits from God’s goodness, “for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Mt. 5:45). As we think about the blessings that shower down from heaven, two things should stand out in our minds. First, God’s blessings descend (Jas. 1:17). Second, our gratitude should ascend (Eph. 5:20). We have so much for which to be thankful, but the paramount focus for our thanksgiving is our salvation in Christ Jesus.

We do not deserve salvation, and we certainly cannot earn it. Salvation is a gift from God that is to be received with thanksgiving, as Paul so eloquently expresses: “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift” (2 Cor. 9:15). So, when it comes to being thankful, we need to be thankful for all that we have received from the hand of God, but again, above all else we are to be thankful for our salvation, our deliverance from the power of darkness (Col. 1:13).

It has been said that salvation is the grandest theme known to mankind; therefore, “I will rejoice in thy salvation” (Ps. 9:14). The good news of the Gospel is that there is forgiveness with God. With this truth in mind, “Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee: and let such as love thy salvation say continually, Let God be magnified” (Ps. 70:4).

Turning our attention to Paul's prayer in Colossians 1:12-14, we will notice three important truths. First, we will notice that we have been delivered from darkness. Secondly, that we have been rescued by a gracious God. Third, we will examine that glorious Kingdom into which we have been translated.

Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:12-14).

### DELIVERED FROM DARKNESS

As we study Scripture there are a number of significant words and phrases that speak of our salvation. For example, in Colossians 1:12-14 we see words like "meet," "inheritance," "light," "translated," "kingdom," "redemption," and "forgiveness." All of those words help us to better understand and appreciate our salvation. At the heart of those terms is the word "delivered" (v. 13). According to *Vines Expository Dictionary*, this word means "to rescue from, to preserve from," and so, "to deliver."<sup>2</sup> Salvation is a matter of deliverance, i.e., we have been rescued. If someone stated that they had been "rescued," what does that tell us about their previous state? Obviously, it was not a good place, but a place from which escape would be desired. Spiritually speaking, before obeying the Gospel, each of us was trapped, held captive in the domain of darkness. It is this very darkness from which we have been rescued and delivered.

*Darkness represents* life before becoming a Christian (Eph. 5:8). Paul gives us vivid detail what a Christless life looks like, saying:

And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others (Eph. 2:1-3).

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind ... (1 Cor. 6:9).

For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another (Tit. 3:3).

When we consider our lives prior to our becoming Christians, we do not see a pretty picture! Those who live in darkness live prodigal lives characterized by waste. The prodigal, the one outside Christ, is wasting what can never be regained (time) in a state of utter darkness. This is the truth of Jesus' parable of the prodigal son, who went off into the far country (Lk. 15:11-32), wasting his life away. A life outside Christ is a wasteful, unproductive, and self-centered life. Its pleasures are passing, its disappointments bitter, and its end is death, both physical and spiritual. "What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death" (Rom. 6:21). This dark life is void of even the smallest benefit. You see, the worst thing about darkness is that those who live in darkness are lost.

*Darkness stands* for that system or order of ungodliness that is existent in society. "Light" and "darkness" are ethical terms—"light" standing for all that is good and right and "darkness" standing for that which is destructive and evil. Darkness is the society of the unspiritual and the godless. To live in darkness is to court the world's favor, follow its customs, adopt its deals, covet its prizes, and seek its fellowship. Jesus said that the works of this world were evil (Jn. 7:7). What then could be said of those who seek fellowship with such?

Darkness can represent several things. Showing that it can represent ignorance, Jesus said: "[H]e that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth" (Jn. 12:35). Understanding is an important part of deliverance. However, understanding is the very thing lacking in those who walk in darkness. Such people have no understanding, no clue that they are lost. They are thoroughly confused by sin (Jer. 3:25). Darkness can also represent things and people Scripturally deemed immoral (Jn. 3:19), unfaithful (Eph. 5:11), separate from God (Mt. 25:30), and loveless (1 Jn. 2:9).

*Darkness Hates Light.* When Christ came into this world, He proclaimed that "men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (Jn. 3:19). Light and dark are enemies in the natural realm and in the spiritual realm. Each represents a drastically different lifestyle. In Matthew 7:13-14, Jesus illustrated this truth by picturing life as a journey offering two paths. One path has a wide gate that leads down a wide road. The other path has a narrow gate that leads down a

narrow road. A vast majority of the people choose the broad path that leads to destruction. Why? Because they are “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” (2 Tim. 3:4).

It is darkness’s natural hatred of light that drives so many to oppose the Truth. One who is in love with darkness, and in love with the pleasures of sin (Heb. 11:25), will have a deep aversion to light and truth. One of the saddest truths that God’s Word teaches is that the majority of the world is going to be lost because they live in the darkness of sin. The ugly truth about darkness is that if we live in darkness, we will die in darkness, if we live in sin, we die in sin (Jn. 8:24). The ultimate end of continuing in the power of darkness is that we cannot go where Jesus is (Jn. 8:22). This is why the Gospel of Jesus Christ is such good news. We are *called by* the Gospel (2 Thess. 2:14), *called out* of darkness into the light (1 Pet. 2:9). Make no mistake about it, the world that the Gospel calls us out of is a world that “lieth in wickedness” (1 Jn. 5:19), it is an “evil world” (Gal. 1:4), a world that is “crooked and perverse” (Phil. 2:15).

*Darkness is Satan’s domain—kingdom.* We all serve somebody. Jesus said: “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Mt. 6:24). Each of us is ruled by either light or darkness. The dark kingdom’s king is Satan. He is described as the “god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4) and “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2). Satan uses darkness to deceive and ensnare us (Rev. 12:9). We should never underestimate our archenemy and his deviousness. He is known as the “tempter” (Mt. 4:3). He is described as a murderer and a liar (Jn. 8:44). Furthermore, he is the one who deceives the whole world (Rev. 12:9), and he is the accuser of the brethren (Rev. 12:10). Satan will do everything within his power to keep men from coming to the light. He is busy promoting evil and ungodliness and, as long as we allow him to prevail, he rules in our lives, he keeps us under his yoke. Throughout time the devil has been very successful in infecting the minds of lost people (2 Cor. 4:4). Those who have never obeyed the Gospel belong to Satan. They are “taken captive by him at his will” (2 Tim. 2:26).

I find it interesting that Paul uses the phrase “taken captive.” We must ask: “When does this happen?” The Scriptures teach that God created man upright, but man, by his own choice, has sought out many inventions (Ecc. 7:29). Therefore, we understand that we are not born

in a state of captivity to Satan. We become his captives as we go astray from God's revealed will (Isa. 53:6). James 1:13-15 shows the step-by-step process of how one goes astray. The "digressive" order of the process is: 1) lust, 2) enticement, 3) temptation, 4) sin, and 5) death. Again, we ask: "At what point in one's life do these things occur?" Shedding light on the subject, Jackson comments: "[M]oral responsibility for sin comes in the "youth" of one's life, and not at the point of one's conception, or birth (see Gen. 8:21; Isa. 7:16, etc.)."<sup>3</sup> "No we are not born in sin; we do not actually sin until we arrive at a stage of spiritual responsibility."<sup>4</sup> When one comes to the point in life commonly referred to as "the age of accountability," and then commits sin, he thereby becomes the servant of sin (Jn. 8:34). In yielding to sin, we yield to Satan and become his captive. Whether we intended to or not, we have become a citizen of Satan's dark kingdom (1 Jn. 3:8). As long as we are part of his domain, we belong to him.

To fully appreciate our deliverance through Christ, we must understand that from which we have been delivered. Even a cursory study of darkness shows us the ugliness and despair of existing in such a state. Our ultimate goal in life is to recover ourselves out of the snare of the devil (1 Tim. 3:7), and to be translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son.

### **DELIVERED BY DIETY**

How appropriate it was for Paul to express his gratitude to the Father in Colossians 1:12. Every Christian should be thankful that Christ has made possible his salvation and that Christ has established His kingdom. Understanding the Godhead is vitally important to being able to fully appreciate this "great salvation" (Heb. 2:3). The Godhead is made up of three Persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Mt. 28:19). The Godhead is composed of three distinct, separate Persons, with all three having one divine essence or nature (1 Jn. 5:7), and all three working together to bring about our salvation. The Scriptures describe the promises of God as "exceeding great and precious" (2 Pet. 1:4). His promises are "great and precious" because they benefit the eternal soul of man, and because it is impossible for God to lie (Tit. 1:2; Heb. 6:18). God's "great and precious" promises to us include redemption (Eph. 1:7), eternal life (1 Jn. 5:11), the peace that passes understanding (Phil. 4:7), justification (Rom. 5:9), and deliverance (Col. 1:13). Through these promises we become partakers

of the Divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4) by means of conversion and sanctification.<sup>5</sup> It is important to understand the role that each member of the Godhead plays in bringing about our salvation. Jackson explained it well when he wrote: “The Father is biblically portrayed as initiating the plan of salvation, while Christ is represented as implementing it by his sacrificial death”<sup>6</sup> ... we would also add that the Holy Spirit is the Revealer of the eternal plan to deliver mankind. Our primary focus here is the roles of the Father and the Son in our deliverance.

According to Ephesians 1:4-6 our eternal redemption was in the mind of the Father “before the foundation of the world” (v. 4). Our deliverance was “not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2 Tim. 1:9). Our salvation is intriguing because we know that God planned and prepared for it from the beginning of time—“Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18). Our deliverance is according to God’s own purpose and grace. About 2 Timothy 1:9, Jackson says:

“Purpose” (*prothesis*) is “that which is planned in advance, plan, purpose, resolve, will” (Danker, 869). No man can be saved according to “his own plan”; rather, he must yield to God’s plan—and God’s plan requires obedience (Jn. 3:36; Rom. 6:17; Heb. 5:8-9; Jas. 2:26). Further, the apostle affirms that the Lord’s “purpose” (plan) is an expression of his “grace” (*charis*); this term is woefully misunderstood in theological circles. It is not a term designed to negate an obedient response to the will of God.

Jackson goes on to say:

There is a great New Testament stress upon the fact that salvation is the result of God’s grace (Eph. 2:8-9), but there are several important aspects to this matter that must be viewed in concert. (a) Heaven’s grace is made available to “all men” (Tit. 2:11), contrary to the claims of Calvinism, which alleges that it is bestowed only upon certain “elect” ones. (b) Divine grace is accessed by means of a system of intellectual instruction (Tit. 2:12; cf. Jn. 6:45); it is not arbitrarily bestowed. (c) Grace is not extended unconditionally (cf. Gen. 6:8; Heb. 11:7)—again, contradicting Calvinism. The Ephesians Christians had been saved “by grace” (Eph.2:8), but their salvation occurred at the point in time when they were “cleansed by the washing of water” (Eph. 5:26), a reference to baptism. (d) Grace excludes merit and

salvation can never be earned (Rom. 6:23; cf. Mt. 18:24-27), but grace must be “accessed” (Rom. 5:1-2; 6:3-4, 17). (e) By grace we can be at peace with God (Rom. 5:1-2) and, achieving that, we become heirs of “the grace of life” (1 Pet. 3:7). (f) It is imperative that the child of God “continue in the grace” he has received (Acts 13:43), and “grow” therein (2 Pet. 3:18). If he does not, he will “fall away” from divine grace (Gal. 5:4; cf. Heb. 12:5), and the grace previously received will have been “in vain” (2 Cor. 6:1; cf. 1 Cor. 15:10).<sup>7</sup>

Our Heavenly Father is very aware of who we are. He knows what is in man (Ps. 103:14; Jn. 2:25; Jer. 17:10). He knew that we would fall short of His glory (Rom. 6:23). He knew that we would be incapable of saving ourselves. He pities us like a father does his son (Ps. 103:13). He has been very gracious in the way that He has dealt with us as sinners, withholding from us the due rewards of our iniquity. Remember, “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). Each of us deserves to die, but if we will avail ourselves of His grace, God does not give us what we deserve. Instead, He offers what we need, salvation. We need to be rescued from darkness.

The damage that sin has done in our lives can be resolved only by God’s grace. “Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound” (Rom. 5:20). The words of Paul serve to remind us that our deliverance is a result of God’s grace. “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)” (Eph. 2:4-5). How glorious is the Gospel message that there is forgiveness with God. “If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared” (Ps. 130:3-4). Yes, when we meet His terms of pardon (Heb. 8:12-13), He stands ready to forgive (Ps. 86:5) and deliver us from darkness and despair.

As said earlier, the Father is Biblically portrayed as initiating the plan of salvation, while *Christ* is represented as implementing it by His sacrificial death. The Godhead planned our salvation and provided the only sacrifice that could satisfy God’s righteousness.

Genesis 3 is the inspired record of sin’s entrance into this world (and Satan’s role in bringing it to pass). Sin brought with it death (Rom. 5:12). Death is the ultimate consequence of sin. “The sting of death is sin” (1 Cor. 15:56). Satan’s goal was to bring sin into the world. He

knew full well that death would follow for man. He tempted Adam and Eve to violate God’s Law. Satan knew that if they would succumb to his temptation, God’s creation would be forever changed and that death would pass upon all men. This would happen not by hereditary depravity, but by each man’s choice in keeping with his free moral agency—the free moral agency with which he was created.

What is the nature of this death Satan has brought about? Is it spiritual death or physical death? Does Genesis 2:17 and Romans 5:12 refer to the breach of fellowship between the Creator and His creation, or the physical decay which was brought about by man’s fall? Or, are both indicated? About Romans 5:12, Wacaster says:

It would seem in view of the context here, spiritual death is under consideration. We do not deny that physical death is included among the consequence of Adam’s sin. But the context points most definitely to spiritual rather than physical death. This conclusion is strengthened by the following cause. “Death passed unto all men, for that all sinned” (Rom. 5:12). Spiritual death passes unto all men for the simple reason that all men have sinned, this truth having been established in Romans 3:23. It was through Adam that death entered, or was introduced to the world. He then clarified precisely how it is that men thus die: “for that all sinned.” The inescapable conclusion is Adam only introduced sin into the world and his descendants merely participated in the same. They were not guilty of his sin, they only had the opportunity to sin themselves because sin had now been introduced to them. Each man had to make the choice as to whether he would or would not sin. But Paul has already proven that all men sin (Rom. 3:23).<sup>8</sup>

Sin is not something that should be taken lightly. Through the sin of Adam, Satan was victorious in bringing sin and, consequently, death into the world. Death, as a result of Adam’s sin was twofold. He died spiritually because his spirit was separated from his Creator. He died physically because he would no longer have access to the tree of life. Satan’s goal was (and is) not only to see God’s creation caught in a downward spiral of physical death and decay, but to see the beautiful fellowship of creature and Creator destroyed for eternity.

As heartbreaking and devastating as physical death can be, we must remember that it is only physical, but the souls of the departed live on for eternity. No, the true tragedy of sin is not physical death. It is the *spiritual death*—separation from God. All men have sinned

(Rom. 3:23), and therefore all men are subject to the guilt and punishment for sin (Rom. 5:12). Since death entered this world, Satan had its power in his hands (Heb. 2:14). In Hebrews 2:14, the Greek word *kratos*, that is here translated “power,” means dominion or strength.<sup>9</sup> Not power over death, but sovereignty or dominion of death.<sup>10</sup> Relative to Satan’s power of death, Jackson observes:

First, it must be stated emphatically that Satan does not possess the power to directly take human life. If such were the case, all Christian people would be dead, for he is our “enemy” (Mt. 13:28). The book of Job demonstrates this truth as well. Satan could only afflict the patriarch as Jehovah allowed, and the Lord refused to grant permission for Job’s life to be terminated (Job 2:6) God is greater than his adversary (cf. 1 Jn. 4:4). The reference to Satan’s “power of death” is doubtless an allusion to the Tempter’s role in the fall of humanity at the beginning of time. Death reigns as a result of sin (Rom. 5:12). Since the devil introduced sin, he is characterized as the “murder” of the human family (Jn. 8:44). Death, therefore, is an appointment for us all (Heb. 9:27—with the exception of those who are alive at the time of Christ’s return—1 Cor. 15:51). Inasmuch as Satan ultimately shares a heavy responsibility for the sin—death equation, in a manner of speaking, he thus is said to have “the power of death.” Not in a direct sense, but only in an historical, associated sense.<sup>11</sup>

Satan’s death grip on mankind had to be broken. Just as David took Goliath’s own sword and cut off the giant’s head with it, David’s greater son took Satan’s weapon of death and destroyed him with it.<sup>12</sup> Inspiration reveals for us how Christ accomplished this, declaring: “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14).

Genesis 3:15 makes it clear that God had prepared a solution for Satan’s diabolical work in the garden. God had a plan in place that would ultimately defeat the devil and restore Jehovah’s fellowship with His creation. God told Satan: “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). God revealed that a Savior was coming to defeat Satan. That Savior would provide salvation and establish His everlasting Kingdom. The Seed of woman crushed the

power of Satan so that what man had lost in Adam, could be more than gained in Christ (Rom. 5:19).

Genesis 3:15 is the first Messianic promise foretelling the coming of the Christ. Down through the ages God kept this promise in the forefront of men's minds. He emphasized His "seed promise" over and over again. In doing so, He added prophetic details which aided His people in identifying the Christ when He came (cf. Gen. 22:18; 2 Sam. 7:12-14; Isa. 7:14; Jer. 31:22; Mic. 5:2).

Coming to the New Testament, we find Mary, the young virgin, who conceived of the Holy Spirit and gave birth to Jesus. Jesus is identified as the Christ, Emmanuel, God with us. God made a promise, and even while His people strayed and lost sight of it, He never altered from His eternal purpose. When the time was right, "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law" (Gal. 4:4). Johnny Ramsey used to say that just as woman introduced sin into the world, she also introduced the Savior as the remedy for our sin (1 Tim. 1:15).

The Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament are full of the hope of a Deliverer, One Who would once and for all end the bondage of His people. Quoting and applying Isaiah 59:20-21, Paul relates: "[T]here shall come out of Zion the Deliverer" (Rom. 11:26, ASV). In bringing deliverance, Jesus emptied Himself of His equality with the Father and "took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men" (Phil. 2:6-7). Speaking of Jesus, John says: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (Jn. 1:14). No one can successfully deny that with the incarnation of Christ the Father's eternal plan to render Satan powerless was about to reach its fruition. To deliver His people, it was necessary for Jesus to become flesh and blood. He had to taste of death for every person (Heb. 2:9). This was necessary for him to destroy the work the devil had begun in the garden. "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil" (1 Jn. 3:8).

Jesus quickly and easily established His superiority over Satan. He cast out unclean spirits (Mk. 5:1-19). His very name caused devils to tremble (Jas. 2:19). His miracles served to identify Him (Jn. 14:11). Still, Jesus knew that His ultimate victory over Satan, sin and its consequences could be achieved only through His own death. Concerning the time and purpose of His death, Jesus let it be known:

Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father,

glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. The people therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to him. Jesus answered and said, This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes. Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me (Jn. 12:27-32).

Jesus would have to taste death in order to cast out the prince of this world and undo his deadly work:

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil (Heb. 2:14).

Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me (Heb. 10:5).

He took the weapon of death out of Satan's hands and defeated our great enemy at the cross. Our Lord attested Himself the "Victor" when He proclaimed: "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death" (Rev. 1:18). Jesus bound the strong man (Mk. 3:27) and, "having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Col. 2:15). By dying on the cross Jesus opened up a new and living way by which we may be rescued from the second death. At the cross, Jesus abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel (2 Tim. 1:10).

While some may glory in their own might and riches, Paul could only find himself glorying only "in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6:14). The cross of Christ has drawing power because it has saving power (1 Cor. 1:18-21). Jesus said: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (Jn.12:32). The cross of Christ has the power to deliver us, to rescue us from darkness and translate us into the kingdom of Christ (Col.1:13). The word "translate" is from the Greek word *methistemi*. According to Vines, this word means "to change, remove."<sup>13</sup> In Colossians 1:13, this word is in the aorist tense (i.e., Greek past tense), which points to an immediate change. We are translated from one kingdom into another. We are translated from Satan's dark kingdom into Christ's glorious kingdom by the operation

of God (Col. 2:12). We are taken out of darkness and placed into Christ's light.

### CHRIST'S GLORIOUS KINGDOM

Christ's glorious kingdom is a kingdom of light. Early in history, as God began to reveal the coming of the Christ, He began to show that the Christ would establish His kingdom (Gen. 3:15; 22:18; 49:10). The earliest Messianic prophecies of Genesis set forth the background to the rest of the Bible.<sup>14</sup> Little by little, God revealed His redemptive plan that would bring about our deliverance. God chose out a family through whom the Christ would come (Gen. 22:17-18), and He preserved the seed of Abraham to accomplish His eternal purpose (Gal. 3:16). The "seed promise" was further limited to the lineage of the house of David. God told David: "And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom" (2 Sam. 7:12). Not only is the Christ's coming prophesied, it is written that He will establish a kingdom. When the kingdom was about to divide (1 Kgs. 11), God through His prophet Ahijah reminded the people that David would always have a lamp, a light before God.

The disruption of the kingdom came about because of the idolatrous leanings of Solomon. The king certainly tolerated and perhaps subsidized the worship of Ashtoreth, Chemosh, Milcom and other deities. He had rejected the Davidic path of absolute commitment to God. Nevertheless, the divine judgement against the house of David was tempered in two ways. (1) the entire kingdom would not be taken from the Davidites; and (2) the judgement would be deferred until after the death of Solomon. God's graciousness to Solomon was based on his faithfulness to David. Solomon may have broken his covenant with God, but God would not break his covenant with David (11:33-36).<sup>15</sup>

During the kingdom period, the prophets were God's spokesmen. They were God's spiritual leaders (2 Kgs. 17:13). The kings, for the most part, were a hindrance to the spiritual well-being of God's people. God's warnings to His people about having a king, in 1 Samuel 8, are seen to be absolute truth.

In 2 Kings 8:16, we read about Judah's fifth king, Jehoram, who was a wicked king. Some believe he was Judah's worst king, and being married to Athaliah, king Ahab's daughter, certainly did not help. He caused Judah to err greatly. Still, God did not destroy Judah for David

His servant's sake. God promised "to give [David] alway a light, and to his children" (2 Kgs. 8:19). This was fulfilled when Christ, the son of David (Mt. 1:1), established His church (Mt. 16:18). Christ's church is the kingdom of light, it is that city set on a hill whose light shines out like a beacon (Mt. 5:14). The church of our Lord is an example of God's wisdom in how He saves ruined humanity and reconciles us back to Himself (Eph. 2:16). The church was planned by Deity (Eph. 3:10-11), prophesied by the Old Testament prophets (Dan. 2:44), predicted by Jesus Christ (Mk. 9:1), and established by God with power on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. On that day, the kingdom of light, into which all nations flow (Isa. 2:2), became a reality. Every person of every nation can access this kingdom and its spiritual blessings and, like Paul, we should give thanks (Col. 1:12). There is no element of God's eternal plan to save man that may be deemed unimportant or insignificant. The church—planned, prophesied and established with power—is God's eternal purpose (Eph. 3:11). We must be in God's kingdom of light, His church, to be rescued from darkness.

#### **THE SPIRITUAL PROCESS INVOLVED IN DELIVERANCE**

Our ultimate goal in life must be to recover ourselves out of the snare of the devil (1 Tim. 3:7) by being translated into the kingdom of light. For this to be accomplished, one must hear the Gospel, for it is God's power to save (Rom. 1:16). It is by the Gospel that we are made aware of our state of darkness and separation. The Gospel not only exposes the problem, it offers the solution by calling us to the Savior (2 Thess. 2:14) and to the light of His kingdom (1 Pet. 2:9; 1 Thess. 2:12).

We have noted that we are delivered from darkness (delivered by deity) and translated into the kingdom of light. We have seen the roles of each Person in the Godhead in our salvation. What many fail to realize and acknowledge is that part of God's eternal plan is that we must come to Him for salvation. Passages that emphasize man's responsibility to come to God for salvation include:

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Mt. 11:28-30).

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned (Mk. 16:15-16).

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? (Acts 2:37).

Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls (Acts 2:41).

And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do (Acts 9:6).

But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him (Acts 10:35).

Sirs, what must I do to be saved? (Acts 16:30).

But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you (Rom. 6:17).

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8).

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12).

And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him (Heb. 5:9).

And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely (Rev. 22:17).

There are those in the religious world who teach that God requires nothing of us in regard to our salvation. Some say anything beyond mental assent is "works salvation." Others teach that mental assent must be expressed verbally, but again, that anything beyond verbal

confession is “works salvation.” Many will claim that salvation is by “grace only,” and that not even mental assent is required by God! When the above verses are considered, obviously, many greatly err not knowing the Scriptures (Mt. 22:29). The truth is, each of the elements discussed is required (God’s grace, our faith and confession of Christ), but those are not the only things God requires of us for our salvation. The Scriptures detail other necessary requirements commanded by God in order for us to be saved—and, if we will be saved we must know and obey His will (Heb. 5:9). While so many claim that *any* act of obedience to God’s commands is a vain attempt to earn salvation, the irony is that both *faith* and *confession* are works commanded by God!

Someone has said: “Thoughts and ideas have consequences.” How true that is. The errant misguided idea that we are saved by “faith only” stands in opposition to Scripture and has serious consequence. To teach justification at the point of faith, one must also conclude that at the point of faith we contact the blood of Jesus. Why? Because it is His blood that justifies and redeems us (Rom. 5:9; Col. 1:14). The Scriptures teach that sin is washed away at the point when one is baptized (Acts 22:16; Rev. 1:5). This is so, not because the water cleanses our flesh (1 Pet. 3:21), but because at baptism we are linked to Christ’s sacrificial death and united with His resurrection (Rom. 6:3-6). The teaching that one is saved by “faith only” also necessitates the conclusion that as soon as one believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, he is translated into His kingdom. The Scriptures teach that the kingdom and the church are one and the same. Furthermore, Scriptures teach that the Lord adds believers to His church (His kingdom) when they are baptized (Acts 2:42-47). The Scriptures also plainly teach that we are “baptized into one body” (1 Cor. 12:13), not that we “believe into” one body.

Just as with all of God’s commands, faith is important and essential. However, by itself, faith is powerless to save (Jas. 2:24). The faith that saves obeys God’s commandments, all the while ignoring man’s attempts to explain away the necessity of obedience (Gal. 5:6; Heb. 5:9).

We can see that many of those things being taught about salvation and about how God translates us into the kingdom are false. Even so, to be saved, we must dig deep and seek the truth of the matter. We must be confident that if we turn to God’s Word, we will find the answers to our questions about God’s plan to save us—and what He requires of us

in order to be saved. We must tune out all of the religious chatter and be like Ezra who prepared his heart to seek God’s law and do it (Ezra 7:10). Let us reason from the Scriptures and learn how it is that God changes us from darkness to light, and translates us into the kingdom of His dear Son.

Every Jew was born into Judaism, then he was taught God’s law. At birth they were part of the nation of Israel. Chosen by God, not for salvation, but to be the nation through which His Seed would come. Throughout Old Testament history it is frequently observed that only a small remnant of God’s chosen nation faithfully served Him (1 Kgs. 19:18). Unlike the way Old Testament Jews were born into the nation of Israel, to be part of Christ’s kingdom, one must first be taught (Jn. 6:44-45), *then* he can experience the spiritual birth. The Hebrew nation was an earthly kingdom entered by physical birth. The Lord’s church is a spiritual kingdom (Jn. 18:36); therefore, it must be entered by a spiritual birth (Jn. 3:5).

This spiritual birth cannot be experienced without faith on the part of the individual, all in keeping with the operation of God (Col. 2:12). In order for that faith to be produced, one must hear the Gospel and choose to believe it (Rom. 10:17; Heb. 11:6; Mk. 16:15-16). Once one has heard and believed that God is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6), he must not only diligently search to know God’s commands, he must obey them.

One will soon discover that a willingness to *repent* of his sins is a prerequisite to being born again (Lk. 13:3; Acts 17:30). God wants us to possess “godly sorrow” (2 Cor. 7:10) for the way we lived our sinful lives. This is so because “godly sorrow” will motivate us to make up our minds to change our lives and live in compliance with His Word. The Psalmist manifested his attitude toward his sin when he declared: “I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin” (Psalm 38:18).

Those diligently seeking to know and obey God’s commandments will also find that they must *confess* with their mouths that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Rom. 10:10, cf. Acts 8:37). Moreover, when a diligent seeker comes to passages where people asked, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37), he will see that they were commanded to be *baptized* (Acts 2:38, 41).

No one can successfully reason from the Scriptures—arguing that since he has already heard and believed the Gospel, that he has already repented of his former way of living and confessed Christ as the Son of

God—that he is exempt from any additional commands. Instead of so arguing, the diligent seeker will see from the Scriptures that God desires to save him and add him to the church. Seeing this, he will not only obey the command to be baptized, he will continue to faithfully observe to do all the Lord commands (Mt. 28:20), trusting that what God has promised He is able also to perform (Rom. 4:21).

While many teach that obedience to God's commandments is not essential to salvation, the Scriptures teach otherwise. The Scriptures teach: 1) that baptism does save (1 Pet. 3:21), 2) that baptism puts us into Christ (Gal. 3:27), 3) that at baptism one does contact the blood of Jesus (Rev.1:5), 4) that at baptism we re-enact the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 6:3-4), 5) and, that at baptism we are translated into the kingdom of light (Acts 2:47; Col. 1:13). When a person is baptized into Christ he becomes a new person (2 Cor. 5:17), and he becomes a citizen of God's kingdom (Phil. 3:20, ASV). The Gospel has the power to change us from being sinners, walking in utter darkness, to being a saint abiding in light (Eph. 5:8). We observe His commandments because He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords (1 Tim. 6:15). It is not our place to question His commands or to demand salvation on our own terms. As those who have been translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son, we are no more in darkness, but we walk as the children of light (Eph. 5:8; 1 Jn. 1:7).

### CONCLUSION

The salvation in Jesus Christ is the grandest theme known to mankind. It does not matter who you are, or where you live. It does not matter what your skin color is or the tribe from which you descended, God does not look upon the face of man (Acts 10:35). Each of us needs salvation and each is called by Jesus Christ Who invited: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Mt. 11:28-30).

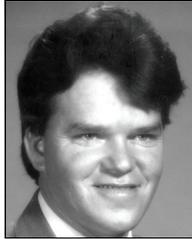
The Lord God planned in eternity how He would atone for our sins. He planned how He would deliver us from the darkness that was yet to come. He planned how He would translate us into His kingdom of light. All that remains is for us to heed His call and abide in His light, keeping ourselves "in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (Ju. 21).

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are taken from the *King James Version* unless otherwise noted.
- <sup>2</sup> W.E. Vine, *Vines Complete Expository Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1996), 157.
- <sup>3</sup> Wayne Jackson, <<http://www.christiancourier.com/articles/793-does-psalm-58-teach-original-sin>>
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, <<http://www.christiancourier.com/articles/276-original-sin-and-a-mis-applied-passage>>
- <sup>5</sup> Robert R. Taylor, Jr. *Studies in First and Second Peter* (Ripley, TN: Taylor Publications 1992), 71.
- <sup>6</sup> Jackson, *Paul's Letters to Timothy and Titus, Before I Die* (Stockton, CA: Christian Courier Publications, 2007), 25.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.
- <sup>8</sup> Tom Wacaster, *Studies In Romans* (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 2005), 256.
- <sup>9</sup> Vine, 479.
- <sup>10</sup> Marvin R. Vincent, *Vincent's Word Studies of the New Testament IV Thessalonians Epistles* (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Company), 404.
- <sup>11</sup> Jackson, *Who Is In Control Of Death* (Stockton, CA: Christian Courier Publications, 1998-2007).
- <sup>12</sup> James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on Hebrews* (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1973), 55.
- <sup>13</sup> Vine, 640.
- <sup>14</sup> John Ramsey, *Practical Bible Studies, Genesis-Esther* (Henderson, TN: Hester Publications, 2002), 1:8-9.
- <sup>15</sup> James E. Smith, *The Books of History* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 2005), 462.

# “LIGHT IS SOWN FOR THE RIGHTEOUS”

*Johnie Scaggs*



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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Psalm 97 is a psalm about the Lord. That He is above all “gods” is set forth in this psalm. His power is great and magnificent; nothing is beyond His power. All creation testifies of His greatness; He is righteous in all that He does. Those who love the Lord will hate evil, and the Lord will protect them from all evil. Each verse in this psalm is designed to give hope to the righteous. It declares unto us that the Lord will overcome, victory will be His, and those who are righteous will share in His victory. The light of the Lord is sown before us and we need to see the great power of the light. John said:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name (Jn. 1:1-12).

No doubt, the light is Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. God has always had the salvation of mankind in mind. Even before Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, God had a plan for the redemption of the souls of men through the blood sacrifice of His Son, Jesus. Luke recorded Peter's words:

Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain (Acts 2:22-23).

Peter wrote:

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you (1 Pet. 1:18-20).

About the "hope of eternal life," Paul penned, "God, that cannot lie, promised [it] before the world began" (Tit. 1:2). David declared: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (Ps. 27:1). Isaiah invited: "O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord" (Isa. 2:5). Later, the inspired Isaiah inscribed:

The Lord shall go forth as a mighty man, he shall stir up jealousy like a man of war: he shall cry, yea, roar; he shall prevail against his enemies. I have long time holden my peace; I have been still, and refrained myself: now will I cry like a travailing woman; I will destroy and devour at once. I will make waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their herbs; and I will make the rivers islands, and I will dry up the pools. And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them (Isa. 42:13-16).

After one deeply studies the "light" spoken about throughout the Old Testament, no doubt will remain that it refers to the Son of God, His coming and shining forth the light, dispelling the darkness, and giving hope to a lost and dying world. The Lord will not forsake the

righteous. Rather, He will shine forth as a beacon in the sky to point the way home to an eternal habitation with God. As the prophet, Micah, said: “Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me” (Mic. 7:8).

Looking forward to the time when the Son of God would come, Zacharias said He would “give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Lk. 1:79). When Jesus did come, He was said to be: “A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel” (Lk. 2:32).

Quoting Jesus, John wrote:

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God (Jn. 3:19-21).

I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life (Jn. 8:12).

Later, in his first epistle, John wrote: “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 Jn. 1:7). In the concluding chapter of Revelation, describing the realm of endless day, John revealed: “And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever” (Rev. 22:5).

“Light,” as it is used referring to the Lord, is a metaphor. As such, it is a figure or symbol standing in the place for the “real thing.” Often, “light” represents the Son of God. However, used as a metaphor, “light” is also found as a symbol for goodness and blessing, God’s favor (showing the joy that comes from being in the light), and Truth.

A further cluster of images links light with truth and understanding as opposed to error and ignorance, and to the illumination that comes from embracing the truth. For example, “The unfolding of thy words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple” (Psa 119:130 RSV). An OT pilgrim equates truth and light when praying that God will “send out thy light and thy truth” to “bring me to thy holy hill” (Psa 43:3 RSV). Daniel is commended as a person in whom are found “light and understanding and excellent wisdom” (Dan 5:14 RSV).

Because truth is represented in the Bible as being a revelation from God, that revelation itself is pictured as light: "Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psa 119:105 RSV). God's law can be characterized as "enlightening the eyes" (Psa 19:8 RSV). As with the law, so with the prophets: Peter describes "the prophetic word" as "a lamp shining in a dark place" (2 Pet 1:19 RSV).<sup>2</sup>

With the coming of the Messiah, He brought the light which would show the righteous the path to heaven, thus bring joy, peace and hope. When God decided it was time for the coming of the Lord, He sent forth His Son to die for the sins of the world and to bring great joy into their lives. "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4:4-5). Luke said: "And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Lk. 2:10-11). Truly, Jesus Christ is the light and, as such, He has brought us great joy, peace and the hope of eternal life. As David said: "Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness: he is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous" (Ps. 112:4). Christ, Who is the Light of the world, the one who brings righteousness, shall bring His healing powers with Him. "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall" (Mal. 4:2).

#### **THE MEANING OF THE WORD "SOWN"**

The word "sown" is used as a simple metaphor that helps us to understand the nature of how the light is shown to the world, thus bringing joy and peace to the righteous ones. "For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations" (Isa. 61:11). God in times past, prepared the world to receive His Son in order for the seed to be sown. This was needed for man's salvation. The very first prophecy recorded in the pages of the Bible had to do with the coming of the Light. God told the serpent: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). When the Lord was crucified, buried and then rose up on the third day, He brought forth the Light to shine

forever more, so that all mankind might be able to see the Light and come to bask in that Light. The Light, which the Lord brought, was to be sown to the entire world (Jn. 3:16). This was the fulfillment of the promise He made to Abraham. Notice, in the context of Psalm 97:11, it is the Light which is sown for the righteous. In this statement, we can visualize the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham—“For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered” (Gen. 13:15-16). Again, Abraham was promised:

That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice (Gen. 22:17-18).

Although they rejected Him and believed they had conquered the Son of God, His Light still shines forth today for the world to see.

That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name (Jn. 1:9-12).

It was needful for the Lord to die so that He could come forth from the grave and live forevermore, thus bringing forth the Light. Jesus said: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (Jn. 12:24). When the Lord came forth from the grave, the Light was sown into the world in order to stamp out the darkness. Those who love the Light will walk in the light. Those who hate the Light will do all they can to dim and even extinguish the Light. Jesus said:

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God (Jn. 3:19-21).

He further stated: “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (Jn. 8:12).

Jesus Christ has brought all manner of heavenly things unto His saints and made them rich to all the intents of bliss by the sowing of Himself as the life of His people. Nor must you think that He served us alone, and promoted our happiness only by His stripes and wounds, and bloody sweat and death. No Beloved, when He rose from the dead, the fact of His Resurrection was a preparing and storing up of future blessedness for His redeemed. When He ascended upon high, leading our captivity captive, did He not then scatter gladness for us? And when He received gifts for men, yes, for the rebellious also, did He not accomplish a boundless sowing of light for the elect people?! At this moment, standing as He does, the high Priest of our profession, pleading before the Majesty of Heaven, what are those pleadings but a sowing of happiness for us—a laying up of bliss which we possess today in measure and shall enjoy hereafter without measure in His Presence before the Throne?<sup>3</sup>

Without the resurrection of the Lord, we would have no Light. Paul explains:

If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming (1 Cor. 15:19-23).

The Light was given to us in Christ and through His Word. Without the preaching of the Word of God, we cannot sow the seed, and thus set forth the Light. The only means by which the light can be sown today is through the preaching and teaching of the Word of God by those who have dedicated their lives to living according to the Gospel of the Lord. John recorded a most informative exchange between Jesus and some He taught. The following begins with Jesus saying ...

And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die. The people answered him, We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever: and how sayest thou, The Son of man must be lifted up? who is this Son of man? Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light. These things spake

Jesus, and departed, and did hide himself from them (Jn. 12:32-36).

How do we lift up the Lord? We can lift up the Lord only through faithfully preaching and teaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That is why He commissioned:

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Mt. 28:19-20).

We must plant the seed of God, which is the Word of God (Lk. 8:11). You cannot reap what you do not plant. Many are not sowing the seed today, but they still expect to enjoy the harvest. It cannot be done! The principle God established in the beginning has not changed; everything reproduces after its own kind when the seed is planted. Moses chronicled: "And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so" (Gen. 1:11). When we are proclaiming the Truth, the Word of God, we are planting the seed. We should also remember that sometimes the harvest does not come until after the one who did the sowing is gone. As Jesus said: "And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours" (Jn. 4:37-38). Our primary objective is to plant the seed and then let God give the increase in His own time. Explaining these matters, Paul pointed out:

I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building (1 Cor. 3:6-9).

Some will receive rewards in this life due to planting the seed, but some will only see the reward in heaven. We must not stop planting just because we do not see the increase when we think we should. Paul exhorted: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).

If we do not plant the seed, who will? The world will not plant the seed. Denominations do not plant the seed, God’s Word. Denominations plant “hybrid seed” (the Bible calls them “tares”). These are not the real seed. They will not produce what the true seed will produce, i.e., Christians. Only the true seed, the pure Word of God, can produce the fruit the Lord intends to bring forth. As God’s children, we need to fully comprehend our task—to preach the Word. Paul told Timothy:

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry (2 Tim. 4:1-5).

#### **WE REAP WHAT WE SOW**

The concept of sowing and reaping is as old as time. You cannot reap what you have not sown. But, you will reap what you have sown, whether good or bad. Speaking to Job, Eliphaz said: “Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same” (Job 4:8). Hosea said: “For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind: it hath no stalk: the bud shall yield no meal: if so be it yield, the strangers shall swallow it up” (Hos. 8:7). Paul warned:

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not (Gal. 6:7-9).

As a youth growing up, I recall listening to the old men talk about the young men sowing their wild oats. Sometimes, one of the men would say: “Leave them alone. Let them sow their wild oats while they are young.” That “wild oats” philosophy has always had a major problem. Those who think that way fail to remember that what you sow is what you reap. If you sow wild oats, do not be surprised at what you reap when the harvest comes.

Sowing is spoken of figuratively for setting various things in motion. In both the OT and the NT it is used for engaging in a righteous or loving activity (Prov 11:18; Eccles 11:1; Hos 10:12; cf. Jas 3:18), for initiating evil and disrupting unity (Job 4:8; Prov 6:14, 19; 16:28; 22:28) and for undertaking a spiritual task (Gal 6:8-9). Linked with harvesting, it gives birth to proverbs about the link between energy expended and outcome expected, such as “you reap whatever you sow” (Gal 6:7 NRSV), “one sows and another reaps” (see Job 31:8; Mic 6:15; cf. Jn 4:37) or “those who sow in tears reap in joy” (see Ps 126:5; Prov 22:8). It is also a metaphor for giving, which if done sparingly will result in a small return, if done generously in a large return (2 Cor 9:7-10).

In Paul the image of sowing is connected with the passage from earthly to heavenly life. In 1 Corinthians 15:35-38 he echoes Jesus’ words about the grain of wheat falling into the ground before it can bear fruit (Jn 12:24). Our present existence is physical in form and perishable in kind: it exhibits weakness and dishonor. The future form will be spiritual and immortal: it will radiate power and glory (1 Cor 15:36-38, 42-44).<sup>4</sup>

When the seed is planted in a good and honest heart, it will produce the right kind of fruit. Only then can one be resurrected in the likeness of the Lord. Paul said:

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection (Rom. 6:3-5).

If one wants to enjoy the fruit of the resurrection, he must be planted in the likeness of Christ’s death. Hence, if a man is saved, baptism is a vital part in his salvation. Without baptism, no man today can enjoy the harvest. You cannot enjoy the fruit of what has not been planted.

#### **THE HARVEST PRODUCES GREAT REWARDS FOR THOSE WHO WALK IN THE LIGHT**

John testified:

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things

write we unto you, that your joy may be full. This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin (1 Jn. 1:3-7).

The blood of Jesus Christ was "shed for many for the remission of sins" (Mt. 26:28). With His blood comes a cleansing element that has the power to remove one's sins as if they had never been there. Conveying the Lord's beckoning, Isaiah wrote: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa. 1:18). The blood of Christ makes our sins as white as snow. God then removes them as if they never happened. About His work of taking away sin, the Lord clearly stated: "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins" (Isa. 43:25). Encouraging are the words of the Psalmist: "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us" (Ps. 103:12).

When one obeys the Gospel of Jesus Christ, he/she becomes an heir of God. Paul pledged: "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29). Further, Paul assured: "That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Tit. 3:7). More encouragement came from Paul with his comforting words:

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together (Rom. 8:14-17).

If we are heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, we will receive the rewards of those who are in the family of God.

As a child of God, we receive great blessings. One of these blessings is the hope of heaven as our home. Speaking to His distressed disciples, Jesus solaced:

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know (Jn. 14:1-4).

What a great blessing it is to know that the Lord has prepared a place for the righteous. Heaven is ours if we continue to do the will of God and press on toward the mark. Understanding this, about himself, Paul related:

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:13-14).

Paul told Timothy: "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses" (1 Tim. 6:12). Because Paul knew well the principle of fighting the good fight, as he was near the end of his life, he was able to truthfully say:

I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

Yes, there is laid up for the righteous a crown of righteousness.

The thought of being with God throughout all eternity is hard to comprehend. It is difficult for us to think in terms of life everlasting because we are finite beings, but our faith is in a God Who cannot lie. We live: "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began" (Tit. 1:2). Therefore, because of the faith we can have in God, we can believe that heaven is real, that the reward is real, and that eternity is real.

In time, the Lord will send forth the reapers upon the earth to gather the wheat into life everlasting. In the parables of the tares, in Matthew 13, the Lord gives the meaning of the parable ...

He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the

wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear (Mt. 13:37-43).

John writes:

Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them. And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped (Rev. 14:12-16).

Revelation 14:17ff tells of the harvest of the grapes of the earth which comes after the first harvest. This harvest is one where those who remain after the first harvest will face the wrath of God. It is the second death. Describing the manner of this event, Paul discloses:

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thess. 4:16-18).

Heaven will be a grand place to be. Heaven is a place where we can spend eternity with the Lord, the angels and all the faithful who have gone before us. Heaven is so wonderful that God has chosen to use "negatives" so that we might know what it is like by knowing what is *not* there. *No Sin* will be there (Rev. 21:27). *No Curse* will be there (Rev. 22:3). *No Sorrow* will be there (Rev. 21:4). *No Pain* will be there

(Rev. 21:4). *No Separation* will be there (Rev. 22:4-5). *No Darkness* will be there (Rev. 22:5). *No Death* will be there (Rev. 21:4).

### CONCLUSION

We should be thankful for the Light which is sown for the righteous. Without the Light we would be without hope in this world, and in the world to come. God's love and His Son's love are so great. As they have loved us, so we should love them. Knowing that the Father and Son love all men, we too must love all men. Because we love the Lord and all men, we will want to do all we can to help save the world by shining the Light into the world.

As the old song says: "Work, for the night is coming, When man works no more." The Lord has put His "epistle" in the hearts of all His faithful servants. Paul told the Christians at Corinth: "Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart" (2 Cor. 3:2-3). God has placed His Word in our hands. It is our responsibility to tell it to others. Remember, we shall reap what we sow.

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are taken from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> Leland Ryken, James Wilhoit, Tremper Longman, ed., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, n.d.), 511.

<sup>3</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, "Sown Light" (1868), Sermon 836. 14:5.  
<[www.spurgeongems.org](http://www.spurgeongems.org)>

<sup>4</sup> Ryken, 909.

# “IF WE WALK IN THE LIGHT”

*Tom Wacaster*



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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

The theme for this year’s *Lubbock Lectureship* is most timely. John tells us: “[T]he whole world lieth in the evil one” (1 Jn. 5:19). The world desperately needs exposure to the light, just as a plant needs the light of the sun to grow and develop. Our task is to reflect the light of our Savior into as many places as possible. Some years ago, I came across the following wonderful illustration of this truth:

Alexander Papaderos, a doctor of philosophy, worked for many years trying to bring peace between the bitterly divided countries of Europe after WWII. His motivation for doing so stems from his childhood and a very odd event which took place. “When I was a small child,” he said, “during the war we were poor and lived in a remote village. One day, on the road, I found the broken pieces of a mirror. A German motorcycle had been wrecked in that place ... I kept one, the largest piece ... By scratching it on a stone, I made it round. I began to play with it as a toy and became fascinated by the fact that I could reflect light into dark places where the sun would never shine—in deep holes and crevices and dark closets. It became a game for me to get light into the most inaccessible places I could find. I kept the little mirror, and as I went about my growing up, I would take it out in idle moments and continue the challenge of the game. As I became mature, I grew to understand that this was a metaphor for what I might do with my life. I came to understand that I am not the light or the source of light. The light [or truth] is there, and it will shine in many dark places only if I reflect it.” He concluded: “I am a fragment of a mirror whose whole design and shape I do not know. Nevertheless, with what I have, I can

reflect light into the dark places of the world ... and change some things in some people. Perhaps others may see and do likewise.”<sup>2</sup>

Without fear of successful contradiction, it can be affirmed that never before in the history of our country: 1) have more wicked men occupied places of leadership, 2) that moral uprightness has never been lower, and 3) that the devil, without doubt, is having free run here and in the world in general! How desperately we need godly men and women who will let their light shine and thus dispel the darkness about them (cf. Mt. 5:16). Yes, beloved, the theme for this year’s Lubbock Lectures is truly very timely! The focus for this study is 1 John 1:5-7, where John states:

And this is the message which we have heard from him and announce unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in the darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

Several lectures in this series draw our attention to the obligation you and I have to live godly lives, lives that demonstrate that we are living according to the light of God’s Word. In like manner, this lesson will focus on the obligation we have to “walk in the light,” and the consequent blessings and benefits of doing just that, with particular emphasis upon how that walk affects our *fellowship* with the Father and with one another. With these things in mind, we turn our attention to the passage before us and the lessons we can draw concerning fellowship.

#### **THE MESSAGE: THE BASIS FOR FELLOWSHIP**

John declares: “And this is the message which we have heard from him and announce unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 Jn. 1:5). The “message” is synonymous with the *Gospel*, the *Truth*, and the *Living Word*. The same apostle, when writing to Gaius, declared: “Greater joy have I none than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth” (3 Jn. 4). Notice that John equates a “walk in the light” (1 Jn. 1:6-8) with “walking in the truth” (3 Jn. 4). Looking back to our assigned passage, we note that the apostle, in slightly more than two dozen words in our English translation, sets forth an iron clad case for inspiration. The message is “from him,” i.e., Jesus Christ. It is not

from men, neither is it the product of human origin. This is precisely the same argument that Paul made regarding the Gospel which he preached (Gal. 1:11-12). Peter likewise declared:

For we did not follow cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty ... And we have the word of prophecy made more sure; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a lamp shining in a dark place ... knowing this first, that no prophecy of scripture is of private interpretation. For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:16-21).

Paul declared: "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness. That the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). That same apostle affirmed: "If any man thinketh himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him take knowledge of the things which I write unto you, that they are the commandment of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:37). All these passages, and many others like them, bespeak the divine authority that lies behind the "message" that John declares was "heard from him" and spoken "unto the world" (1 Jn. 1:5). Immediately we are struck with the basis for any and all fellowship, whether vertical (with the Father and the Son) or horizontal (with one another). The standard for fellowship is not sincerity, good intentions, mere feelings or the opinions of men. Stated succinctly, the basis for fellowship is the Word of God (Col. 3:17) as prepared, prophesied, and proclaimed by the holy apostles and prophets (2 Pet. 3:1-2) who were inspired to do so.

Before leaving 1 John 1:5, there is one more item that deserves at least some comment. The "message" (or at least that facet of the message here noted by John) is, "that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." Herein we find the reason why God alone deserves the right to serve as the foundation and basis of fellowship. Unlike mortal man, deity has no hint of darkness—not even the slightest trace or speck thereof! Barnes relates:

The expression here is designed to affirm that God is absolutely perfect; that there is nothing in him which is in any way imperfect, or which would dim or mar the pure splendor of his character, not even as much as the smallest spot would on the sun.<sup>3</sup>

It is precisely because God *is* light, and that there is not one scintilla of darkness in Him that He can, and does, serve as the authority and basis of fellowship. Man, on the other hand, has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23), thereby disqualifying himself from serving as the authority or basis for fellowship.

#### **THE MANNER OF LIFE: THE PREREQUISITE OF FELLOWSHIP**

A “prerequisite” is something “previously required or necessary to something subsequent; as, certain attainments are prerequisite to an admission or orders.”<sup>4</sup> In 1 John 1:5-7, the “prerequisite” to fellowship is a “walk in the light.” That being the case, it is important to determine exactly what it means to “walk in the light,” and the implications associated with such a walk.

Our English word “walk” is used quite often in the New Testament to translate the Greek *peripateo*. Thayer says the word means “to make one’s way, progress; to make due use of the opportunities.”<sup>5</sup> Strong adds, “figuratively to live, deport oneself, to be occupied with.”<sup>6</sup> Our English word “light” translates *phos*, which simply means, “light, illumination.” Thayer points out that metaphorically the word speaks of “the truth and its knowledge, together with the spiritual purity associated with it.”<sup>7</sup>

In 1 John 1:5-7, John makes a strong contrast between light and darkness. It is important, therefore, that we say something relative to the meaning of “darkness,” as it is used here. The Greek *skotos* is used metaphorically in the New Testament to speak of “ignorance respecting divine things and human duties, and the accompanying ungodliness and immorality, together with their consequent misery in hell.”<sup>8</sup> The word is so used by Paul in Ephesians 5:8—“For ye were once darkness, but are now light in the Lord: walk as children of light.” Right here the point needs to be pressed that light and darkness are of such opposite natures as to be exclusive one of the other. This might be illustrated by the physical natures of light and darkness. It is impossible for a dark room to remain dark when light is brought into that room. This is because light *dispels* darkness. There is a corresponding spiritual law wherein it is impossible for light and darkness to dwell together in harmony. For that reason, Paul says: “Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers: for what fellowship have righteousness and iniquity? or what communion hath light with darkness?” (2 Cor. 6:14). The apostle

was not seeking answers, but was setting forth rhetorical questions, to which the answers to each being, "*None!*" This is why Paul admonished the church at Ephesus: "[H]ave no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather even reprove them" (Eph. 5:11).

Before going further, it should be pointed out that to "walk in the light" does not mean *sinless perfection*. Were that the case, then none of us would have the slightest hope of heaven. The apostle John makes this point in the passage before us; and, he does so from two different standpoints.

First, he affirms that when we "walk in the light" (1Jn. 1:7), the "blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin." Meditate on this and consider: "If walking in the light is sinless perfection, then wherein is the need for the blood of Jesus to cleanse us *while* we are walking in that light?" We may not completely understand the magnitude and magnificence of John's statement here, but we cannot escape the undeniable truth that we occasionally do sin—even while endeavoring to walk in the light! How could it be otherwise?

Second, John goes on to tell us that, though while we are indeed walking in the light, any affirmation that we "have no sin" is paramount to self-deception, and "the truth is not in us" (1Jn. 1:8). The amazing grace of God in regard to this matter should not be taken for granted. "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid" (Rom. 6:1-2). "[O]nly use not your freedom for an occasion to the flesh, but through love be servants one to another" (Gal. 5:13b). There are certain responsibilities and obligations that rest upon those who would seek to "walk in the light." These obligations are stated positively and negatively in the Word of God. Inspiration instructs:

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vain glory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever (1 Jn. 2:15-17).

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world (1 Jn. 4:1).

Yea, and for this very cause adding on your part all diligence, in your faith supply virtue; and in your virtue knowledge; and in your knowledge self-control; and in your self-control patience;

and in your patience godliness; and in your godliness brotherly kindness; and in your brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, they make you to be not idle nor unfruitful unto the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:5-8).

[N]ot forsaking our own assembling together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day drawing nigh (Heb. 10:25).

Put to death therefore your members which are upon the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry; for which things' sake cometh the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience: wherein ye also once walked, when ye lived in these things; but now do ye also put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, railing, shameful speaking out of your mouth: lie not one to another; seeing that ye have put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the new man, that is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of him that created him (Col. 3:5-10).

Time and space would fail should we provide every passage of like nature. These will suffice to prove that a “walk in the light” is a life of “sanctification without which no man shall see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14b).

#### **THE MOTIVATION: THE BENEFITS OF FELLOWSHIP**

One of the amazing features of God’s covenant with men is the fact that He invites us to investigate. For example, Malachi 3:10 states:

Bring ye the whole tithe into the store-house, that there may be food in my house, and prove me now herewith, saith Jehovah of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

Surely the New Testament’s counterpart to that is Romans 12:1-2, which exhorts:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service. And be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Proper motivation plays an important part in moving men to repentance. Sometimes that motivation comes in the form of a “negative” statement or admonition. Jesus used this approach when He warned: “[E]xcept ye repent, ye shall all in like manner perish” (Lk. 13:3). Sometimes God’s motivation is positive in nature. Showing that God uses this method, Paul asks: “Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” (Rom. 2:4).

In 1John 1:7-9, associated with our “walk in the light,” the apostle sets forth two wonderful promises: 1) fellowship with God and with one another, and 2) the cleansing power of the blood of Christ. Both of these serve as motivation for godly living and a determined effort on our part to “walk in the light.” Attention must be given to both of these.

*Fellowship With God And With One Another*

*Defining Terms*—The best place to begin is with a definition of the word “fellowship.” Our English word “fellowship” is translated the Greek word *koinonia*. Thayer defines the word as: “fellowship, association, community, communion, joint participation; the share that anyone has in anything.”<sup>9</sup> The word is used to describe the bond of fellowship that unites Christians together. W.E. Vine defines *koinonia* as: “Communion, fellowship, sharing in common ... to have fellowship with or in.”<sup>10</sup> Arndt and Gingrich define *koinonia* as: “association, communion, fellowship, close relationship,” with a secondary meaning of “generosity, fellow feeling, altruism.”<sup>11</sup> This Greek word *koinonia* appears more than twenty times in the New Testament (cf. Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 1:9; Gal. 2:9; Phil. 1:5; 1 Jn. 1:3, 6-7). A closely related noun, *koinonos*, is defined by Thayer as: “a partner, associate, sharer in anything.”<sup>12</sup> Arndt and Gingrich define that word as: “one who takes part in something with someone.”<sup>13</sup> Regarding the Biblical concept of “fellowship,” in his commendable commentary on 1 John, Guy N. Woods remarks:

Fellowship is partnership, joint sharing. Through the acceptance of the Word of life a unity of faith, practice and worship is established, and it was for this purpose that the life was being declared. Here, in the most emphatic fashion, the writer points out that only in unity of faith is there communion in religion. It is possible to have fellowship only when there is a common bond established in faith, work, and love.<sup>14</sup>

For the purposes of this study, “fellowship” is being defined as: “*participation with and encouragement of one another in those matters concerning the faith, and our walk therein.*”

#### *Avoiding Extremes*

As with any other matter, we must seek to avoid extremes. With regard to fellowship, one extreme would be *extending fellowship to those in error*. Some suggest that we can and should extend fellowship to virtually everyone, “regardless” of what their spiritual condition might be. Obviously, we cannot avoid association with those about us who are not members of the body of Christ. We cannot, as Paul says, “go out of the world” (1 Cor. 5:10b). Any attempt to escape the pollutions of the world, spiritually speaking, by isolating ourselves from society is not only forbidden, it is foolish to attempt to do so. Rather than doing that, we are to render our influence for the good of others, and the uplifting of the Christ to the glory of God the Father. Any association with the world is fraught with the danger that we might succumb to their way of thinking (Rom. 12:1-2). We must, therefore, avoid any *encouragement* to those in sin which might cause them to conclude that their present condition (morally or religiously) is acceptable unto us or to God. Nor can there be participation with them in any activity (morally or religiously) wherein we fail to uphold and maintain the lines of demarcation between truth and error, sin and righteousness, or light and darkness. When a Christian has the opportunity to attend and/or speak at some denominational gathering, for example, the impression cannot be left with those in error that he condones, overlooks, or in any way approves of their error. Nothing the Christian says or does should give them encouragement in the course of error they are following.

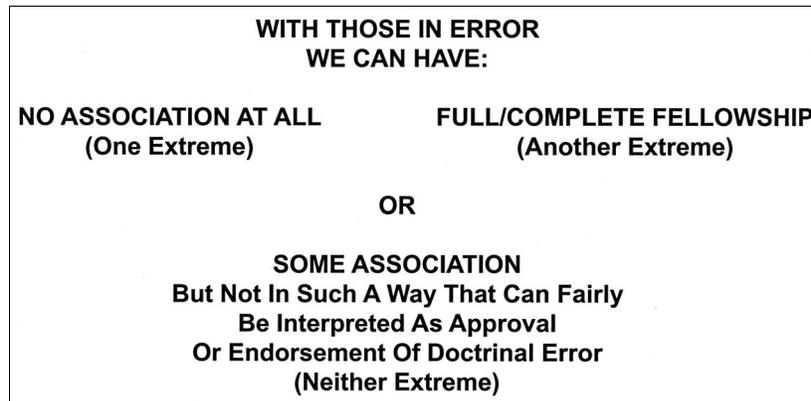
The other extreme we must avoid is that of withholding fellowship from those who themselves are walking in the light. The brotherhood has been fractured over what is sometimes called “the ‘anti’ movement.” It is not within the scope of this lesson to survey and address the issues that have divided the brotherhood and destroyed the sweet fellowship that should have been maintained in the body of Christ. Still, one matter which has recently disturbed the Lord’s church needs to be mentioned.

Though not “anti” in its nature, there is an issue which has, in my estimation, done much harm to the brotherhood. I have been asked to

address it in my lecture. "Guilt by association" is a "battle cry" that is being used by some brethren to draw lines of fellowship. They insist that a line of fellowship must be drawn on the basis of one's "association" with someone known or suspected of teaching error, thus they are fracturing the body of Christ into needless "camps." In a lecture addressing this very topic brother Terry Hightower warned:

While some improperly squeal in protest "guilt by association" in their defense of heretics when we make the above point, I wish to make it clear that we ought to equally oppose the false view that any and all contact, association, or participation with or alongside errorists automatically constitutes an endorsement or encouragement of their heretical views. A few preachers among us claim that even to attend a class at ACU is sinful "fellowship," but does this mean that to be consistent they will also argue that to attend a class on the campus of a secular university implies the same thing? Are we to maintain that one's mere physical presence at an event always automatically implies endorsement of any error held or subsequently taught at such occurrences? No!<sup>15</sup>

The following chart was provided by brother Hightower that might be helpful.<sup>16</sup>



Again from brother Hightower:

The reason that my assigned task is so complex is set out quite succinctly by Solomon's pen: "He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the righteous, Both of them alike are an abomination to Jehovah" (Pr. 17:15). In other words, if I speak on a program, will I be justifying (or fellowshiping) the wicked

who may also be on it, and if I refuse to speak, will I be condemning (or refusing to fellowship) the righteous persons involved? If we maintain (as do some among us) that we can decide negatively about speaking on a particular program simply on the basis of one principle to the disregard of others, we may find ourselves ending up like the fellow who felt compelled to withdraw fellowship from everyone at the drop of a hat.<sup>17</sup>

Some years ago, I heard a wise elder give an answer to the question regarding the length of a woman's dress, i.e., whether it was to be considered modest or immodest. His answer was something like this: "I may not know exactly how short is too short, but I can tell when the line has been passed." In answering the question as to whether or not appearing on a particular lectureship has violated God's divine law of fellowship as set forth in 2 John 9-11, I sometimes feel the same way: "I may not know exactly whether any particular situation violates John's warning, but I know when the line has been crossed."

Let me set forth two imaginary scenarios to demonstrate our point. First, consider, if you will, a congregation with a track record of openly and habitually violating a number of passages in the New Testament with regard to worship, morals, doctrine, *et al.* Also, over the years, the speakers for this congregation are continually selected from the "who's who" among the rankest of liberal preachers. Now, with that congregation as it is, unless given the freedom in my presentation to address the grievous errors of that congregation, I would not appear on their lectureship. I would not want to be associated in any way with such a congregation.

The second scenario is this. I am invited to speak on a lectureship where at least one of the speakers, brother "A," has extended the right hand of fellowship to another whom I deem guilty of fatal error, brother X." Brother "A" does not hold to the doctrine, nor does he teach the doctrine that brother "X" teaches, but he does not consider it fatal false doctrine. In all other matters, brother "A" has demonstrated loyalty to the truth. His past record has been one of unswerving loyalty to the cause of Christ and is so reflected in his preaching and living. Although brother "X" has not been invited to speak on this particular lectureship to which I have been invited, some would argue that because brother "A" has extended fellowship to brother "X," that should I appear on the lectureship with brother "A," then my appearance is an endorsement of the fatal error of brother "X." Some, in their zeal to abide by the

passages regarding error and fellowship (such as 2 Jn. 9-11), would thus argue: "Guilt by association!" Such, in my estimation, is an unfair accusation. That kind of reasoning would place us in the hopeless situation of never knowing for certain whether or not we have violated 2 John 9-11. It would also demand that we know every position of every speaker on a program before we agree to appear on the same program ourselves.

#### *The Cleansing Blood Of Jesus Christ*

The second blessing that motivates us to "walk in the light" is the cleansing power of the blood of Christ. The Bible is saturated with references to the blood of our Lord. In the Old Testament the precious blood of Christ is presented in types and shadows. Speaking of the cleansing power of the blood of Christ, Zechariah prophesied: "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness" (Zech. 13:1). Under the Law of Moses the blood of animals foreshadowed the precious blood of Christ. However, the blood of bulls and goats could never cleanse the soul (Heb. 10:4); it would take the blood of the sinless Savior to redeem man from sin.

The book of Ephesians is a wonderful treatise on the church of Jesus Christ. A fine thread relative to the blood of Christ runs through the first part of Ephesians. To it our attention is focused time and again. Paul succinctly stated it—"[N]ow in Christ Jesus ye that once were far off are made nigh in the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:13) It is to the last seven words in that verse—"made nigh in the blood of Christ"—that I want to call your attention. A glorious hope is held out to the recipients of this letter. Yes, at one time they were "alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). "But now"—*Now*—as members of the body of Christ their hopelessness and despair has been washed away. *Now*—they no longer stand far off, but are near to God and His Son. *Now*—they are "in Christ," and in fellowship with the Father. *Now*—they have access to every spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3). What a contrast! How can any Christian read those beautiful words and fail to bow in humble appreciation for having been cleansed? The word "nigh" could mean near in time or near in distance. Using that word here, the apostle is expressing, not physical distance, but spiritual distance. Paul sets forth a contrast between their former

state, wherein they had “no hope” and were “without God in the world,” and their present state, wherein they enjoyed fellowship with the Father. They were made “nigh,” now permitted to draw near to God, because of the sacrificially shed blood of Christ!

The blood of Jesus is the ransom for souls in bondage to sin. Without His shed blood there could be no redemption (cf. 1 Pet. 1:18-19). The renowned atheist of the nineteenth century, Robert Ingersol, was fond of referring to Christianity as a “blood religion.” Although he said this in derision, it is true that Christianity *is* a blood religion. You cannot separate the blood of Christ from the preaching of the Gospel. Why should this surprise us? If men will look at history, they will notice that every upward movement in the history of the world is a movement paved with blood. It is because that in the shedding of blood we see the greatest devotion and love a man might manifest, whether it be love for God or love for one’s fellow man. We call this “vicarious suffering.”

Unfortunately, the author of the following is unknown. He deserves credit for his forceful message. The writer says:

This principle of vicarious suffering is the foundation upon which civilization has been built—in fact upon which all society has been built, civilized or uncivilized. It is also the essential principle of human progress towards that one, far-off event, towards which the whole creation moves. Not so many years ago there went forth from our homes thousands of fine young men. They crossed the rolling deep and pitched their tents on Flanders fields and in the valleys of the Argonne. When they started out, many thought it would be a lark. But the poetry of war soon vanished, and nothing was left but the prose. They lived in dug-outs. They marched and ate and slept in mud. They rushed into living hells. They had ribs fractured, eyes put out, lungs filled with gas, limbs shot away. Thousand cried for water as they lay dying on the battlefields, and received it not. They were cold and weary and homesick. No one but Almighty God knows the length and breadth and depth of the awful anguish and suffering of those who fought, bled and died on those European battlefields. Why did fathers leave their homes and go to the front? Why did young men, postponing the day of marriage, press the last, long, lingering kisses upon the lips of the sweethearts, and then rush away into war with its uncertain future? I am still convinced that they died for a principle. I refuse to believe that it was all in vain—that a sacrifice is ever in vain. There may

have been greed, graft and corruption mixed up with all of it, but there was nobility, too! Autocracy had to be overthrown, lest our own wives and daughters might have to suffer what the innocent women and children of Belgium and France suffered. The war had its sordid side, of course; but surely all this bloodshed was not meaningless! A thousand times; yea, ten thousand times—No! I still believe that these men suffered to advance the cause of democracy and freedom.

As for me, I glory in the crimson line. I am thrilled when I read its suggestive meaning in the cup of the Lord’s Supper. I am moved with an unexplainable ecstasy when I see the ancient altars dripping with the blood of the slain lambs. Now I understand why the destroying angel who passed over Egypt at the hour of midnight, passed over those houses where the blood was sprinkled on the door-post. Now I know to whom Isaiah refers, when he writes of One “in red apparel coming in dyed garments”; whom John the Revelator refers to, when he describes that heavenly chieftain whose vesture was dipped in blood; what Simon Peter means when he writes of that precious blood which cleanseth from all sin; and what the writer of our text has in mind when he declares that “apart from shedding of blood there is no remission.” I want to say to you, with all the power of emphasis and persuasion of which I am capable, that by the precious blood of Jesus you will be saved, or you will never be saved at all. In all ages God has never pardoned a single sin-sick soul except on the merits of our Savior’s precious blood, and He never will. That lonely hill back of Jerusalem was the battleground of which the Prince of heaven fought with the powers of darkness, and won. There God turned an evil thing into a channel of blessing. There, Sin, in slaying the Son of God, slew itself.

Were it not for the blood of Jesus, we could never draw near to God the Father, nor would we possess any hope of that heavenly home prepared for the redeemed of every age. Thank God for the blood of Jesus our Lord! Beloved, if a man cannot be motivated to “walk in the light” by the amazing love of Christ—love that caused Him to shed His blood in our behalf—then I suggest that there is nothing that *can* motivate him.

### CONCLUSION

Heaven has provided innumerable blessings to those who choose to “walk in the light.” Sweet fellowship with the Father, and with one another, remains one of the great benefits to those who so conform their

lives to the image of Christ our Lord. May God give us courage to hear and obey Him as we strive to “walk in the light.”

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are taken from the American Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> Source unknown.

<sup>3</sup> Albert Barnes, *Barnes Notes* E-Sword.

<sup>4</sup> *Webster's Dictionary*, s.v. “prerequisite,” E-Sword.

<sup>5</sup> J.H. Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. “walk,” E-Sword.

<sup>6</sup> James Strong, *Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary*, s.v. “walk,” E-Sword.

<sup>7</sup> Thayer, s.v. “light.”

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, s.v. “fellowship.”

<sup>10</sup> W.E. Vine, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996).

<sup>11</sup> Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 438-439.

<sup>12</sup> Thayer.

<sup>13</sup> Arndt and Gingrich, 439

<sup>14</sup> Guy N. Woods, *Peter, John, Jude, Gospel Advocate Commentaries* (Nashville, TN, 1968), 213.

<sup>15</sup> Terry Hightower, “May One Speak On Programs Where Questionable People Appear?” *Do You Understand Fellowship?* Twenty-Eight Annual Florida School of Preaching Lectures (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 2003), 269.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

# “THY JUDGMENTS ARE AS THE LIGHT”

*H.D. Simmons*



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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

As the people of the living God, we must understand our responsibility to walk in the light (Jn. 8:12; 1 Jn. 1:7-10; cf. Jn. 12:36; Mt. 5:14-16; Phil. 2:15; Eph. 5:8). This is not possible without the light of the inspired Word of God. The concept of God’s Word being viewed as light is frequently found in the Scriptures (Ps. 119:105, 130; Pro. 6:23). What light they furnish to man from his Creator. How much darker our world would be without this precious light. Consider how truly dark this world would be without the light of God’s dear Word.

In our text for this study, the prophet Hosea made a profound announcement concerning the Word of God. Our text states:

Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth: and thy judgments are as the light that goeth forth (Hos. 6:5).

## THE PROPHET HOSEA

Hosea takes his place among the great lovers of all time. His love for his spouse was so strong that even her vilest behavior did not destroy his love for her. She broke his heart, yet this experience made it possible for him to know the infinite heart of God more clearly, and to give to the world a clearer picture of the immensity of divine love.<sup>2</sup>

## THE BACKGROUND FOR HOSEA’S WORK

During the reign of Jeroboam II, in Israel, God’s people enjoyed peace and prosperity. In such times, the Bible shows that God’s people

thoughtlessly drifted into ease, transgression, extravagance and oppression. The careless living of God's children brought them into debauchery. During this confusing time, the prophet Amos came with burning messages of truth. It seems the people could not, or would not, see the evidence of the serious consequences he predicted for them. Assyria was quiet, and the surrounding nations were not bothering Israel, so the Israelites refused to think of God's judgments coming upon them. It seemed as if the two Jewish kingdoms were having their place in the sun, having their way in the world. Yet, God's prophet could see the sure signs of decay and calamity of God's judgment that awaited these foolish people.<sup>3</sup> The prophecies of Hosea are addressed almost equally to Israel and Judah. Their rebellion is deeply deplored, their captivity is foretold and their final restoration is promised.<sup>4</sup>

Jeroboam's son, Zechariah, who had come to the throne, was assassinated only six months after taking power. His assassin reigned for only one month and was killed by Menahem, who then took the throne. Anarchy was having its way—it seemed no king was safe. In 745 B.C., Tiglath Pileser of Assyria began his conquering career. There was no kingdom able to stand against his might. Menahem was forced to pay Assyria great tribute, or otherwise be destroyed. The Assyrian yoke was fastened securely on Israel's neck. All their wealth, peace and safety were soon taken away.<sup>5</sup>

After Menahem's death, his son, Pekah, came to the throne. He attempted to throw off the Assyrian yoke. Rezin of Damascus joined him in this fight, but the kingdom of Judea did not. Thus, Pekah and Rezin came against Judah, which motivated Judah's king, fearful and faithless Ahaz, to call on Tiglath Pileser for assistance. The Assyrian army came and overthrew Damascus and most of Israel. The Assyrians left Samaria in shambles, with Hoshea, their puppet king, on the throne of Israel. During these years of anarchy, bloodshed, revolt and the downfall of the nation, Hosea did his work in Israel. His task was to preach God's message to people who had little concern for things of a spiritual nature. Death, decay and dissolution were all around the prophet, yet he stood firm as the Lord's representative in Israel.<sup>6</sup>

#### **SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS DURING THE TIME OF HOSEA**

There was a general attitude of looseness and laxness concerning personal behavior during the time of Hosea's work among God's

people. The rulers, leaders and priests set very poor examples for the people. Family life had fallen into shambles. The priests had failed in their responsibility to be familiar with God’s Word, and they often lived despicable lives. Moral and ethical requirements were eliminated. Living ungodly lives seemed to be attractive to God’s children. God’s people were emulating the surrounding heathen nations in idol worship. On every hand, living among these horrible conditions, witnessing God’s people going into apostasy broke the heart of Hosea.<sup>7</sup> Many of the conditions in Hosea’s day are quite similar to conditions in our time. One can find many parallels in the two periods. Surely, God’s people today will listen to this great prophet.

#### NOTE THE CONTEXT

As with understanding any Bible verse, one of our first considerations must be context. When one does not have a proper understanding of the context of any verse under study, errors in comprehension will usually occur. One must notice the context of our passage to properly understand the text. God’s people were denounced by the prophet for their involvement with false religion (Hos. 4:12ff). The Lord had given them true religion, yet they became involved in the false religions of their neighbors—idolatry. It reminds us of some brethren today. God has revealed, in the New Testament, His glorious church, but they desire the teachings and practices of their neighbors—denominationalism: man-made religion (Col. 2:22). In Hosea’s day, God’s people had rejected His Law (Hos. 4:6). Whenever God’s people reject His Book, immorality and wickedness always will follow. The leaders of the Lord’s people were wicked and did not lead the people in godliness (Hos. 5:1). Thus, because of these conditions, God said He would be as a lion to His people (Hos. 5:14). He would tear them, yet, if they would return to Him, He would heal them and raise them up again (Hos. 6:1-2). Their faithfulness was as the morning cloud and the dew that soon disappeared (Hos. 6:4). Therefore, by His prophets God would cut them and slay them by the Words of His mouth, by His judgments that went forth as light (Hos. 6:5). In the midst of all this evil, God’s people seemed to think *outward* service to God was the solution. They needed to understand living so wickedly and offering a sacrifice was not the answer (Hos. 6:6). Have God’s people really changed? Some think they can live all week long as the world, come and partake of the Lord’s Supper on Sunday, then go back to worldliness on Monday, and all will

be right with God. They seem to actually believe our Lord will accept such hypocrisy. Therefore, as a lion, God would tear Hosea's people and slay them with His powerful Word.

This powerful Word will still cut to our hearts. The writer of Hebrews said it was powerful and effective to do its work and sharper than any two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12). Paul said the Gospel is God's power to save lost people (Rom. 1:16). Isaiah said God's Word will perform its intended function; it will not return unto the Lord void (Isa. 55:8-11). This Word will do a wonderful work on our hearts today, if we will only allow it to work on our hearts (Jas. 1:22-25).

The immediate context, Hosea 6:1-5, is often viewed in two different manners. Note:

- Some view these verses as a sincere prayer of the people and an urgent appeal to one another to come back to God.
- Others see these verses as God's people lacking in genuine sincerity and connect the verses directly with Hosea 5:15. And, that they thought all they needed was a slight imitation to return to God and He would receive them back into His fellowship.

The view taken depends on whether one connects Hosea 6:1-3 with 5:15, or with 6:4. Two things are known about the situation here:

1. They were destroyed for their lack of knowledge (Hos. 4:6), and
2. If they would sincerely return to God He would heal them.

However, if they were insincere, they would not fool the Lord and He would not return to them. The second interpretation seems to be more in line with the immediate context.<sup>8</sup>

### **GOD'S PEOPLE WERE INCONSTANT**

They were so inconsistent in their personal godliness that God described their goodness as disappearing as the clouds and the dew (Hos. 6:4). The consequence of Israel's unsteadiness and inconstancy is indicated by our text. Because of their constant fluctuating between false religion and true religion, instead of building up His people the Lord cut them down through His inspired prophets by strong and fierce denunciations; and, God slew them through His powerful divine Word. The judgment of the Lord went forth in His Word as a lightening flash, and it was as clear as the light of day. Their mere outward services to God could not atone for their hypocrisy (1 Sam. 15:22).<sup>9</sup>

Hosea made it quite clear, by his preaching, that because the love of God's people for their Lord vanished again and again, He had no choice but to punish His people.<sup>10</sup> Similar to a father in the last struggle of necessity against his own son the Lord dwells upon the good things in the character of Ephraim, the heir of Jacob's favorite son, before God consents to cast him off as rebellious and the same spirit is shown to the kingdom of Judah (Hos. 6:4; 11:8).<sup>11</sup>

The condition of God's people at this time was pathetic. It can be described as a constant repenting then soon relapsing, smitten by God, then returning temporarily to Him, resolving then soon forgetting; an ever beginning yet never finishing. It was a fair show of leaves without any fruit. The past misery and mercy of God did not even seem to influence them at all. God's people must realize that their goodness must endure under the burning heat of the sun. There remained nothing for the Lord to do but chastise them because of their desperate condition. God's Word, which disturbs those living in sin and produces conviction in the human heart, was the instrument the Lord used to accomplish His will under these conditions. It is always the case that man will always be better or worse, quickened or slain after hearing God's saving truth (Acts 2:36-38; 2 Cor. 2:16).<sup>12</sup>

#### NOTE THE TEXT

The language in our text is of course figurative. The word translated "hew" (*chatsable*) means not merely to cut off but rather to hew or to carve. By His powerful Word, the Lord would carve out the nation, shape it into a holy nation answering to its true calling.<sup>13</sup> As one would hew hard wood to the required form, so the Lord dealt with His people through His Word to cause them to correspond to the character of godly individuals. God had hewn them as a stonemason hews the rock until it is fit to be used as a building stone (1 Chr. 22:2). What a sculpture is to a block of marble so the Word of God must be to God's people. The Great Sculptor seeks to correct, to cut into symmetry. As a great hammer wielded by the Divine hand, the authoritative Word is efficient in breaking the rock—the hardened heart (Jer. 23:29). Hosea had met with rough stones, hardened hearts that had to be hammered and humbled before the Creator.

The slaying is metaphorical and consisted of the denunciations of the prophets who preached God's Word. The Divine judgments were likely these denunciations that went forth as lightening to the people.

The judgments God laid out were so conspicuous that everyone should have observed them and taken them to heart. His Word would break out like daylight, like a sudden blaze of light upon the people, as sudden and as overpowering as the lightening. The Hebrew word, *owr*, translated “light,” conveys the idea of being or making luminous, as the light of day. Thus, the meaning of the word is illumination or luminary; thus, including light or lightening. God had slain the wicked by the Word of His mouth, His Word announced by His spokesmen (1 Kgs. 21:19-24; 22:15-37; 2 Kgs. 9:1-10). God’s judgments revealed the sin of His people and exposed the works of darkness in their lives (Eph. 5:11, 13). His punitive judgments, through His Word, had come to light. Yet, all of God’s efforts to train His people were spoiled by their own stubbornness and hardness of heart (Heb. 3:13). This text clearly indicates to our preachers today why they must never soothe men in their sins, but rather expose the darkness among His people.<sup>14</sup> God identifies His actions with that of His prophets; God’s inspired Word as being His instrument for executing His will (Jer. 1:10; Ezek. 43:3).<sup>15</sup>

#### THY JUDGMENTS

In our text, Hosea has returned to his main theme of warning God’s people about their sins. Because of their sin, God had sent His prophets with words of warning.<sup>16</sup> Since these people had despised God’s gentler warnings and measures, He now used more severe measures.<sup>17</sup> It was because of the apostasy and debauchery of His people that God cut them down through His prophets by stern denunciations and slew them by His divine Word. These judgments may refer to His words of judgment, or acts of judgment He had brought upon them. The Hebrew word translated “judgments” is *mishpat*. This word comes from the word *shaphat*, which means to litigate and it also means a verdict, a sentence or a decree. The word often denotes God’s Word in the Old Testament (Ps. 119:13, 43, 102, 106, 108; 147:19; Ezek. 5:7; 18:9; 20:19, 21).<sup>18</sup> God’s people had rejected both these judgments. His judgments toward them had gone forth as a lightening flash, and it was as clear and conspicuous as the light of day. They were clear and ominous as the lightening. They were as clear as a bright light coming out of thick darkness or as clear light coming through dark clouds.<sup>19</sup> The judgments are the judgments God had denounced against and inflicted on His own people. As they plunged into apostasy, He wanted

them to know that mere outward religious services could never make up for their defilement.<sup>20</sup>

The goodness of God's people had been as the morning cloud and the morning dew that quickly vanishes before the scorching sun. Because of their love having been as a transient cloud, God condemned them by His prophets. He has slain them by His divine judgments that had been made as clear to them as the light of a clear day.<sup>21</sup> God's prophets had preached clearly against the fickleness of the people. The words of judgment had been evident and swift, alluding to the velocity and splendor of light.<sup>22</sup>

What had been the response to all God had done to bring His people back to Him? The response was one of persistent transgression and treachery toward the Lord.<sup>23</sup>

God's people had been clearly cautioned, warned and admonished, but instead of guarding themselves, they had been heedless and rebellious. God had striven with them in a variety of ways, yet their lives were marked by instability and indecision.<sup>24</sup>

It is a sad truth that often the reprov'd will fly in the face of the reprover, and even consider him an enemy because he tells them the truth (Gal. 4:16).<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, God's people at this time refused to be reformed. Therefore, what was meant for their wealth became their destruction.<sup>26</sup> Since these people would not be "hewn" by the message of the prophets, the message "slew" them.<sup>27</sup>

Most of the nation chose the sentence of death proclaimed by the prophet's message. God's call to repentance—or to experience His judgment—is always plain, forthright, unambiguous and bright as the light (Mt. 3:1-2; 4:17; Lk. 13:3, 5; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30-31).<sup>28</sup> The words of God's prophets had the cutting-edge of Divine Authority.<sup>29</sup>

### **WHY DID GOD DO THIS TO HIS PEOPLE?**

One might ask: "What was the reason for God hewing and slaying His own people?" Hosea 6:6 states clearly the reason for this action of God. It was because God desires and takes pleasure in love and in the knowledge of the Lord. Therefore, He had made every effort to engender this love and knowledge in His people. Such loving knowledge will prompt man to offer sacrifices in keeping with God's will. Without this love and knowledge, the Lord does not desire man's sacrifices and burnt offerings.<sup>30</sup> It is clear in this passage that true love is rooted in the correct knowledge of God.<sup>31</sup> Romans 10:1-4 also makes

it clear that zeal for God must also be accompanied by the correct knowledge of God for one to be accepted by the Lord.

One discovers this same concept in the New Testament. Paul told the preacher Titus to rebuke God's people sharply. Yet, one must ask why Titus was to perform this task? So, that God's people would be sound in the faith (Tit. 1:3-13). Jesus made it clear to His people: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten" (Rev. 3:19). As with Hosea, these actions are for the benefit of the children of the Lord.

The Lord shows He was constrained by urgent necessity to deal sharply with His people. There is no father who cherishes his children so dearly as the Heavenly Father, and He loves to deal with us kindly. Yet, when God's children are attracted by an ungodly world and fall into apostasy, He is constrained to deal with them severely. Thus, He had hewed His people by His prophets. They had become so perverse that He had to make His Word, by the prophets, like a hammer or an ax (Jer. 23:29). It became necessary that His Word should be to them as an ax—it was necessary that His Word slay them. His judgments, in His Word, thus were to be as a light going forth to His people. God had warned them, yet they transgressed knowingly and willingly. Like shining light, He had revealed to them the right way to live. He had not concealed from them what was right; for as the sun shines on the earth, His teaching had been to them as the light to show them the way of God, but this had come about with no profit because of their perverseness.<sup>32</sup> Jeremiah compared God's Word to fire and the ungodly people to wood being burned in that fire (Jer. 5:14).

The reason the Lord had to punish His people in this manner is made clear in Hosea 6:6ff. They had reached the point where they felt heartless sacrifices would cover their sins. These sacrifices were not only displeasing to God; these actions were abominations in His sight.<sup>33</sup>

Today, our culture seems to consider any chastisement as unloving. Some "scholars" have considered these words so harsh (I have slain them by the words of my mouth) that they have amended the words to say: "Therefore I have hewed them tablets of stone and taught them by the words of My mouth."<sup>34</sup> Why is it so difficult for some to see that God punished these people because of His great love for them?

#### **ISRAEL'S RELIGION IN THE TIME OF HOSEA**

There is such a thing as pure religion (Jas. 1:27). Throughout the Bible, God also explains the worthlessness of impure religion (Mt.

15:9). To properly understand our subject, it is vital to understand the type of religion God's people were practicing during the time of Hosea. God had given them pure religion through His inspired revelation, but this is not what the people of God were practicing at that time. All men who are truly interested in religion should desire God's pure religion.

Various means had been tried by the Lord to bring these people back to true religion: wondrous blessings, precious promises, various punishments and alarming threatenings of wrath—yet, they refused to return to God's truth. One might ask: "For what had they traded pure religion?"<sup>35</sup> First, strange but true, they traded pure religion for the false religion of their surrounding neighbors. Repeatedly, God had warned them against this practice, yet they persisted in this folly. The God of the universe revealed pure holy religion to them, yet they chose the corrupted religion of mere men over the Truth of God. As one reads the long account in the Old Testament of Israel's apostasy, the question is haunting: "Why would one choose something corruptible for what was incorruptible?" Still, that was exactly what the Israelites chose.

Secondly, God's people chose a religion of inconsistency (Hos. 6:4). There is a clear contrast between the constancy of God's precious grace (Hos. 6:3), and the inconsistency of Israel's religion (Hos. 6:4). God's children were as fickle as He was faithful. This is seen throughout their history. At Sinai they promised to be obedient to Him, then they built a golden calf. In the Book of Judges the cycle one notes is:

- Sinning by the people, then
- God's sends oppression, then
- They cry to God for deliverance, then
- God delivers them, then
- They go back to sin.

That cycle is repeated for over four hundred years. Even the great reformations in the time of certain kings (Hezekiah, Josiah) were only short-lived. This same inconsistency can often be noted in the lives of various individuals throughout their history. The Lord explained how the dew of the morning dries up in the blazing heat of the sun, early it is fresh and thick, but soon it is carried away by evaporation. As the gathering cloud disappears, so does the faithfulness of His children. God's people's religion was merely an instance of momentary excitement and goodness. This religion is of no value at any time in

history. It is like the dew—soon exhaled by the summer beams, it is like the cloud—empty, fickle, disappointing—it is worthless.<sup>36</sup>

Their religion was fickle, heedless, and incorrigible. This type religion is totally defective. It lacks depth. It has no root. Such religion makes great promises to God, but seldom does it bring forth the fruit of righteousness, and if it does, it is only for an instant. The nature of man is only superficially moved with this religion, but there is no genuine conviction of sin, no turning of one's heart and one's life to God.<sup>37</sup>

The religious impressions that seemed to move these individuals did not endure. One of the tests of pure religion is endurance. Religion is not worth having which does not endure. It will always be tested by everyday life, trials, the glitter of this world and various temptations. Some have known no other religion than that of passing convictions, weak desires and good resolutions that usually come to nothing.<sup>38</sup>

The following points summarize the religion of the Jews during Hosea's time. Consider:

- God's people were practicing syncretism. This is the practice of combining various elements of different religions. They were combining monotheism with idolatry, which is basically creating another form of idolatry.
- God's people were practicing "form" religion. This is offering worship which is not consistent with one's daily living. This is inconsistent religion. The Lord's people were living ungodly lives, then, without repentance, offering worship to God. They were no longer listening to God's Word and they were quite rebellious to the Lord, but still offering Him worship. Note these passages concerning "form" religion: (Isa. 1:11-17; Jer. 6:20, 7:9; Amos 5:21-24).
- God's people were offering insincere worship. They were going through the outward forms of worship (offering sacrifices) but they were not sincere in this worship.
- God's people were practicing vain religion. They added human elements to their worship, making their worship vain (Mk. 7:6-9).

It was because of this practice of vain religion that Hosea proclaimed: "Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth: and thy judgments are as the light that goeth forth" (Hos. 6:5).

### THE RELIGION OF GOD'S PEOPLE TODAY

God's people today must be certain that they do not repeat the same errors. However, many of the Lord's children today are guilty of the same sins when they:

- Combine unscriptural Denominational elements of worship to the worship revealed in the New Testament (Col. 2:22).
- Offer worship that is not consistent with their daily living (Mt. 16:24).
- Offer worship that is not sincere (Jn. 4:24; Mt. 15:8).
- Combine human elements to their worship and to the pure New Testament teaching (Mk. 7: 6-9).

This is one of the reasons why studying the Old Testament is vital for the church today. As is often said: "If man does not study history, then he is destined to repeat the mistakes of the past." If the Lord's people do not study the Old Testament, they are sure to repeat the same sins as His people in the Old Testament period (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11-12). In every age, God has revealed how He wished to be worshipped by His people. If God's people desire for Him to accept their worship, they must worship only as He directs in His inspired Word. There must be New Testament authority for all we do in our worship, and for every precept that God's people teach (Col. 3:17).

This same fickle vain religion of Hosea's time can be found among some of God's people today. At times, some of them seem to have times of awakening to their worldly condition and unfaithfulness. Tears of seeming contrition may cloud their eyes, but soon the sorrow and tears pass away, and the serious impressions of reform vanish with them. Yes, we are still meeting with this "morning-cloud" religion among the people of God. Broken hearts and contrite spirits must still be the pledge of true love for the Lord. Yet, as the dew of the morning dries up and as the cloud vanishes away the pledge of repentance soon passes away with many of God's people. Why does this happen among God's children? There are likely several reasons and we may never know them all. Even so, some of the reasons that seem to be certain are:

1. A genuine lack of true sincerity on the part of some of God's people,
2. The chronic levity and fickleness on the part of others,

3. The problem of serious temptation, and
4. The influence of a worldly society.<sup>39</sup>

Whatever the reasons may be, God's people must not allow vain and fickle religion to infect God's church.

#### **THE SOCIETY IN WHICH GOD'S PEOPLE LIVE**

As one notes God's people in the Old Testament, God's children in the New Testament must realize that our society is far from God. It is far away from God in at least the following areas:

1. Its thoughts—it ignores His claims and His commands.
2. Its sympathies—its heart is on those things that are repugnant to a holy nation.
3. Its pursuits—its pursuits are those of carnal and selfish gratifications.<sup>40</sup>

As with God's people in the Old Testament God's people today are becoming far too comfortable with an ungodly world.<sup>41</sup>

#### **GOD'S WORD AS A GREAT LIGHT SHOWS THAT SIN WILL NOT GO UNPUNISHED**

In our day, the majority seemingly believes that sin will go unpunished by God. That was exactly what the Israelites believed in Hosea's day. Hosea did his best to prove that God is just; thus, He cannot and will not allow sin to go unpunished. His Word, as a great light, illuminates the fact that we must repent of our sins, not simply excuse our sins. All through God's Word, there are warnings to this effect.

As in Hosea's time, some have set their wills in hostility to the Lord. They simply will not have the Lord to reign over them. Some are rebels and will not lay down their arms of hostility and submit to heaven's will and become loyal subjects of the Christ. In this condition, they are crushed, they are diseased; and, they will not accept the means He has prescribed for their restoration to God. They are captives; they are slaves who will not leave their cells, though He has thrown the prison doors wide open. Even modern-day religion will not accept His prescription for true freedom. These slaves to sin are paupers dying of starvation, yet they will not take from the Lord His gift of the Bread of life.<sup>42</sup>

Who is it that has the courage to tell them? Some of them sit in our buildings, but we are too "loving" (?) to warn them. How tragic!

### **WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH THIS PRECIOUS LIGHT?**

What an honor it is that we have the privilege to know this wondrous light from our gracious Creator. A most vital question of our life is: "What shall we do with God's precious light?" The response to this question will, to a large extent, determine our eternal destiny. When we reject this wondrous light, we are judging ourselves unworthy of everlasting life (Acts 13:46).

The souls of men are like blocks of marble, and the Lord is the great Sculptor. He lovingly sent the Hebrew prophets to carve Israel into the Divine Image. Yet, their religion was as thin as vapor and their hearts as hard as stone. There is a great lesson for preachers of our day. Much of a preacher's work, contrary to popular belief, is to prick the slumbering conscience and to hammer the stony heart. The concept has been lost that God uses His law to slay. The Word of God is equipped to produce the recognition of sin in its true nature and to show its consequences. His Law slays when it is allowed to produce the guilt, condemnation and remorse needed in our lives. It contains the ability to convict and to condemn (Acts 2:37). Our brethren must understand that an individual must be slain in relation to sin, before he can come to the Lord. His Word must be allowed to come as a light to manifest our sins, for persistent sinfulness on man's part will shut him off from the beauty of God's precious mercy. Brethren, we must remember that we are destined to live with God eternally. We are on this earth to be prepared to serve Him in heaven. Teaching and preaching that reminds us of this, and fits us for this, must be received thankfully.<sup>43</sup>

### **THIS LIGHT WILL ONE DAY JUDGE OUR SOULS**

One day, we will all stand before our Creator and we will be judged (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:12; Mt. 25:31ff; Heb. 9:27). What a thought: "We will stand before the One Who knows every ugly word we have ever uttered and every ugly secret deed we have ever committed." What will be the standard of this judgment? The light of God's precious Word will judge our souls (Jn. 12:48). Do we really spend enough time in our daily lives learning the very standard of our eternal judgment? What could be more important?

### **CONCLUSION**

When it comes to our sins, God's Word is as clear and ominous as a flash of lightening in our back yards—if we will but listen to Him.

How we need this illuminating flash of light in the pulpits of the church of the Lord. Many factors have caused such preaching to completely cease in many of our pulpits. The practice of the exposure of sin in our pulpits, though desperately needed, is perceived by some of us as unloving, unkind and negative. Even many conservative brethren would simply rather not hear it. Some of them say it does not edify God's people. Peace, at the price of condoning and completely ignoring ungodliness, worldliness and sin is perceived by some as expedient for our congregations. Men like Hosea would not be welcome in many of our pulpits today. Vague generalities are fine, but specific condemnation of our personal sins is completely out of place in many pulpits. This condition will lead to even more acceptance of sin and worldliness in the church, and a further weakening of the people of God. Many of our preachers would never preach false doctrine, yet neither will they boldly confront and expose worldliness and ungodliness in the church. These preachers are too "gentlemanly" (?) to do this. Maybe so, but could it be that they are also too cowardly and too fond of their present positions? Could it be that they are more concerned about their popularity than being true to the Word of God? What a disgrace! God will deal with such cowards. Tragically though, in the mean time, they are hurting and weakening God's precious church. We desperately need men with boldness and courage who will not spare, but who will sound forth their voices like a trumpet and show God's people their sins (Isa. 58:1).

The text under study here reminds us of Paul's charge to the young preacher Timothy (2 Tim. 4:1-5). He was charged in the strongest terms, to be urgent in his preaching of God's Word. Though many of God's people would turn from the Word, he was commanded to be urgent in preaching it to them. Brother J. W. McGarvey well says:

The time-servers so abundant in our modern pulpits, who will never rebuke sin, except at a long distance; who speak none but smooth words about corruption in the church; and whose whole study is personal popularity. Such men care for souls only as these souls may in some way glorify them. They are too faithful to their own aggrandizement to think of being faithful to God... It is implied in God's Word if a religious teacher does shrink, through any personal or selfish consideration, from declaring the whole counsel of God to those he teaches, in some sense the blood of those who may be lost through his neglect will be upon

him (Ac. 20:23-28, Ezek. 3:16-21, 18:6). This is an unspeakably fearful responsibility, and it should never be lost sight of.<sup>44</sup>

In Daniel, chapter four, Daniel had a word of judgment from God for the great Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar. Some among us may ask: "Should such royalty receive such a negative message?" The answer is a resounding and bold: "Absolutely so!" Brethren must understand that there are times when God's message is unpleasant, nonetheless it is God's message and we must proclaim it with all love and boldness. People in the world do not want to hear that they are lost. Yet, if they do not realize this truth, how will they desire to be saved from their sins? If the Lord's church does not tell them, then no one will tell them. Our brethren need to be told that we are getting too close to the world. If we do not tell them, then who will tell them? If we do not tell them, my preaching friends, and they are lost, then we share in the responsibility of their lost condition. We must lovingly and boldly tell them now, before it is too late! Yes, some of you will lose comfortable jobs, positions and big salaries; yet, heaven will be worth it all.

God's people must still be slain by His Words. The power is still there in His Word. His judgments must still go forth as the light, as lightening flashing across the sky it must go forth. Will you have a part in this great work? It is not time to lay your armor down. It is time to use the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17). Do you have the courage to do so? If not, please for the sake of your soul and for the sake of many others find another job. Let us with all our strength and might wield that powerful sword, while we still can. If God be for us, who can be against us (Rom. 8:31)?

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are taken from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> Kyle Yates, *Preaching From The Prophets* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1942), 53.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> William Smith, *Old Testament History* (Joplin, MS: College Press, 1976), 619.

<sup>5</sup> Yates, 54.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-55.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 55-57.

<sup>8</sup> Homer Hailey, *A Commentary On The Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1972), 155-156.

<sup>9</sup> *The Pulpit Commentary*, ed., H.D.M. Spence and Joseph Excell (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1962), 13:168.

<sup>10</sup> Kyle, 98.

<sup>11</sup> Smith, 619-620.

<sup>12</sup> James Wolfendale, *The Preacher's Complete Homiletic Commentary on The Old Testament* (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls Co.), 90-91.

<sup>13</sup> C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary On The Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1978), 10:98.

<sup>14</sup> *Pulpit Commentary*, 13:168; Theo Laetsch, *The Minor Prophets* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 60; Wolfendale, 91; Kyle, 99; James Strong, *Exhaustive Concordance Of The Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers), 9.

<sup>15</sup> Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, *One Volume Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Associated Publishers And Authors), 655.

<sup>16</sup> Frank Gaebelien, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Regency Reference Library, 1985), 7:194.

<sup>17</sup> Albert Barnes, *Barnes Notes On The Old And New Testaments, The Minor Prophets A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), 1:66.

<sup>18</sup> Barnes, 1:66; Strong's, 75, 120, 557. (It would seem to this author that judgments here refer to judgments in God's Word. This idea also fits the context in Hosea 6:5).

<sup>19</sup> Barnes, 1:66.

<sup>20</sup> *Pulpit Commentary*, 13:168: Gaebelien, 194.

<sup>21</sup> Hailey, 156.

<sup>22</sup> Adam Clarke, *Clarke's Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press), 4:635.

<sup>23</sup> Campbell Morgan, *An Exposition Of The Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming Revell, 1993), 374.

<sup>24</sup> Joseph Exell, *The Biblical Illustrator* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977), 10:122.

<sup>25</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary On The Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1961), 1113.

<sup>26</sup> Barnes, 1:66.

<sup>27</sup> God's people today are to be carved into the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 2:20; 4:19; Phil. 2:5).

<sup>28</sup> Paul Butler, *Minor Prophets, Bible Study Textbook* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1977), 495.

<sup>29</sup> *The New Bible Commentary*, ed., D. Guthrie, and J. Motyer (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1993), 710.

<sup>30</sup> Laetsch, 60.

<sup>31</sup> Hailey, 156.

<sup>32</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2005), 13:227-229.

<sup>33</sup> Note these passages concerning this type of form religion (Isa. 1:11-17; Mic. 6:8). Kyle, 99.

<sup>34</sup> George Buttrich, *The Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1980), 4:627.

<sup>35</sup> *Pulpit Commentary*, 13:175.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 13:180.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 13:180, 193.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 13:180, 193, 198.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 13:175, 178, 182.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 13:191.

<sup>41</sup> Note carefully these passages (Rom.12:2; 2 Cor. 6:17; Jas. 1:27; 4:4; 1 Jn. 2:15-17).

<sup>42</sup> *Pulpit Commentary*, 13:193.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 13:179, 182.

<sup>44</sup> J.W. Mc Garvey, *New Commentary On Acts Of Apostles* (Cincinnati, OH: Standard Publishing Foundation), 1:187, 189-190.